The Boy Hunters

by Mayne Reid

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BOY HUNTERS ***

Captain Mayne Reid

"The Boy Hunters"

Chapter One.

The Home of the Hunter-Naturalist.

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

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

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

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

railing that shut in the verandah, clung vines, rose-bushes, and convolvulus plants, that at certain seasons of the year were clustered over with beautiful flowers.

The house faced the river, standing, as I have said, on its western bank—on the same side with Point Coupée. In front was a lawn, some two hundred yards in length, that stretched toward the river, and ended on the low bluff forming its bank. This lawn was enclosed by high rail-fences, and variegated with clumps of shrubbery and ornamental trees. Most of them were indigenous to the country; but there were exotics as well. Among the trees you could not fail to notice the large-flowered magnolia (Magnolia grandiflora), the red mulberry (Morus rubra), the pale-green leaves of the catalpa, the tall tulip-tree (liriodendron), and the shining foliage of the orange.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Two.

The Hunter-Naturalist and his Family.

In 1815 was fought the famous battle of Waterloo, and in the same year Napoleon Bonaparte was exiled to the island-rock of Saint Helena. Many French officers, who had followed the fortunes of the great adventurer, at that time emigrated to America.

Most of these, as was very natural, sought the French settlements on the Mississippi, and there made their homes for life. Among them was one named Landi, who had been a colonel of chasseurs in Napoleon's army. He was by birth a Corsican; and it was through his being a friend and early acquaintance of one of the Bonaparte family that he had been induced to become an officer in the French army—for in his youth he had been fonder of science than soldiering.

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

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

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

region of the Mississippi valley, teeming with objects of interest both to the hunter and the naturalist? In my opinion, he made good choice of his home.

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

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

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

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

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

None of his neighbours ever visited the Colonel, except on matters of business. Indeed he had no visitors of any sort, if we except one or two of his former military

associates, who lived at New Orleans, and came up to his house about once a-year to talk over old times, and taste his venison. On such occasions “Napoleon le Grand” was of course the main subject of conversation. Like all old soldiers of the Empire, Landi worshipped Napoleon; but there was one of the Bonaparte family for whom the naturalist entertained a still higher feeling of regard, amounting in fact to sincere friendship. This was Charles Lucien, prince of Musignano.

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

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

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

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

society.

Chapter Three.

The Prince’s Letter.

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

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

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

Look at Basil, the oldest of the boys. He is at work fixing some straps to a hunting-saddle, that lies on the grass beside him. Basil is exactly seventeen years of age. He is a fine-looking lad, though not what you might call handsome. His face has a courageous expression, and his form betokens strength. His hair is straight, and black as jet. He is more like an Italian than either of his brothers. He is, in fact, the son of his father—a true Corsican. Basil is a “mighty hunter.” He is more fond of the chase than of aught else. He loves hunting for itself, and delights in its dangers. He

has got beyond the age of bird-catching and squirrel shooting. His ambition is not now to be satisfied with anything less exciting than a panther, bear, or buffalo hunt.

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

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

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

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

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

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

boat."

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

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

In a short time the white cloud of steam was seen ascending over the trees; and then the huge vessel came "bulging" around a bend of the river, cleaving the brown current as she went. She was soon opposite the lawn; and, sure enough, proved to be what Lucien had said she was—the mail-steamer "Buck-eye." This was a triumph for Lucien, although he bore it with characteristic modesty.

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

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

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

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

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

The letter was soon opened, and perused.

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

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

"Hugot, you must go to Saint Louis."

"Bien, mon Colonel!"

“You must start by the first boat.”

“Très-bien, mon Colonel!”

“You must procure for me the skin of a white buffalo.”

“That will not be difficult, monsieur.”

“More difficult than you imagine, I fear.”

“With money, monsieur?”

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

“Ah! mon Colonel! that is different.”

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

“I will do my best, Colonel.”

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

“Restez tranquille, mon Colonel; I shall do all that.”

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

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

“It is a Saint Louis boat,” said Lucien. “It is the ‘Belle of the West.’”

Lucien, who had a quick talent in that way, could tell, by the sound of their steam-pipe, almost every boat that plied upon the Mississippi. In half-an-hour the

steamer hove in sight, and it was seen that he had again guessed correctly. It was a Saint Louis boat, and the “Belle of the West,” too!

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

Chapter Four.

Going on a Great Hunt.

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

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

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

“No, Colonel,” muttered Hugot, in reply.

“You tried everywhere?”

“Everywhere.”

“You advertised in the papers?”

“In all the papers, monsieur.”

“You offered a high price?”

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

“I would give five thousand!”

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

“What says Monsieur Choteau?”

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

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

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

“On the prairies!” mechanically echoed his father.

“Yes, papa. Send Basil, and Lucien, and myself. We’ll find you a white buffalo, I warrant you.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

And so saying, the old Colonel hobbled back into the house followed by his three boys; while Hugot, looking very jaded and feeling very hungry, brought up the rear.

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

The naturalist was greatly influenced by the desire he felt to gratify his friend the Prince. He was influenced, too, by another feeling. He felt secretly pleased at the bold and enterprising character thus exhibited in his children, and he was not the man to throw cold water upon any enterprise they might design. Indeed, he often boasted to his neighbours and friends how he had trained them up to be men, calling them his “boy-men,” and his “jeunes chasseurs.” And truly had he trained them to a complete self-reliance, as far as lay in his power. He had taught them to ride, to

swim, to dive deep rivers, to fling the lasso, to climb tall trees, and scale steep cliffs, to bring down birds upon the wing, or beasts upon the run, with the arrow and the unerring rifle. He had trained them to sleep in the open air—in the dark forest—on the unsheltered prairie—along the white snow-wreath—anywhere—with but a blanket or a buffalo-robe for their beds. He had taught them to live upon the simplest food; and the knowledge of practical botany which he had imparted to them—more particularly to Lucien—would enable them, in case of need, to draw sustenance from plants and trees, from roots and fruits—to find resources where ignorant men might starve. They knew how to kindle a fire without either flint, steel, or detonating powder. They could discover their direction without a compass—from the rocks, and the trees, and the signs of the heavens; and, in addition to all, they had been taught, as far as was then known, the geography of that vast wilderness that stretched from their own home to the far shores of the Pacific Ocean.

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

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

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

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

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

Now you will wonder, my young friend, when you come to think of these Indians—when you come to consider that fifty warlike nations of them live and roam over the prairies—many of them sworn foes to white men, killing the latter wherever they may meet them, as you would a mad dog or a poisonous spider,—I say, when you consider these things, you will wonder that this old French or Corsican father should consent to let his sons go upon so dangerous an expedition. It seems unnatural, does it not? In fact, quite improbable, when we come to reflect that the Colonel dearly loved his three sons, almost as dearly as his own life. And yet one would say, he could hardly have found a readier plan to get rid of them, than thus to send them forth among savages. Upon what, then, did he rely for their safety? On their age? No. He knew the Indians better than that. He knew very well that their age would not be cared for, should they chance to fall in with any of the tribes hostile to the whites. It is true, that the savages might not scalp them on this account—being boys,—but they would be very certain to carry them into a captivity from which they might never return. Or did their father anticipate that the excursion should extend no farther than the country of some friendly tribe? He entertained no such idea. Had this been their plan, their errand would have been likely to prove fruitless. In a country of that sort they would have seen but little of the buffalo; for it is well-known that the buffaloes are only found in plenty upon those parts of the

prairies termed “war grounds”—that is, where several tribes go to hunt, who are at war with each other. In fact, that is the reason why these animals are more numerous there than elsewhere, as the hunters are fewer, on account of the danger they incur of coming into collision with each other. In a territory which is exclusively in possession of any particular tribe, the buffaloes are soon killed or run off by incessant hunting. It is a fact, therefore, well-known among prairie-hunters, that wherever buffaloes are plenty there is plenty of danger as well, though the converse of this is not always true. On the neutral or “war grounds” of the Indians, you may meet with a friendly tribe one day, and on the next, or even within the next hour, you may fall in with a band of savages who will scalp you on sight.

Now, the father of our three boy hunters knew all this, as well as I know it. How then are we to account for his apparently unnatural conduct, in permitting them to risk their lives in such an enterprise? It would be quite unaccountable indeed were it not that there was a mystery connected with it, which I shall explain to you hereafter. All I can tell you now is, that when the three were mounted and about to start, the Colonel hobbled up; and, drawing from his pocket a small leathern bag or case ornamented with stained porcupine quills, he handed it to Basil, saying as he did so: “Take good care of it, Basil—you know its use—never let it part from you—your lives may depend upon it. God be with you, my brave boys. Adieu!” Basil took the case, passed the string over his shoulders, pushed the bag under the breast of his hunting-shirt, pressed his father’s hand, and putting the spur to his horse rode briskly off. Lucien saluted his father with a kiss, waved his hand gracefully to Hugot, and followed. François remained a moment behind the rest—rode up to Hugot—caught hold of his great moustache, gave it a twitch that caused the ex-chasseur to grin again; and then, with a loud yell of laughter, wheeled his pony, and galloped after his brothers.

The Colonel and Hugot stood for some moments watching them. When the boy hunters had reached the edge of the woods, all three reined up, turned in their

saddles, and, taking off their hats, uttered a parting cheer. The Colonel and Hugot cheered in return. When the noise had subsided, the voice of François was heard shouting back,—

“Fear not, papa! we’ll bring you the white buffalo!”

Chapter Five.

The Camp of the Boy Hunters.

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

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

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

It was in a small glade or opening, such as are often met with in the forests west of the Mississippi. There was about an acre of clear ground, covered with grass and flowers, among which helianthus and blue lupines were conspicuous. Tall trees grew all around; and you could tell from their leaves that these trees were of different

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

The young hunters had halted nearly two hours before sunset, in order to give time to prepare their night-camp. About half-an-hour after their halt, the little glade presented a picture somewhat as follows:—Near its edge stood a small canvas tent, like a white cone or pyramid. The fly, or opening, was thrown back, for the evening was fine, and there was no one inside. A little to one side of the tent lay three saddles upon the grass. They were of the Mexican fashion, with high pommel and cantle, a “horn” in front, with a staple and ring firmly fastened in the wood of the tree. There were several thongs of leather fastened to other rings behind the cantle; but the stirrups were steel ones, and not those clumsy blocks of wood which so much disfigure the Mexican saddle. Beside the saddles was an odd-looking object. It

resembled a gigantic book, partly open, and set upon the opened edges. It was a pack-saddle, also of Mexican fashion, and in that country called an “alpareja.” It had a strong leathern girth, with a breech-strap to keep it from running forward upon the shoulders of the animal that might wear it. At a short distance from the saddles, several blankets—red and green ones—with a bear-skin and a couple of buffalo-robes, were lying upon the grass; and on a branch overhead hung whips, bridles, water-gourds, and spurs. Against the trunk of a tulip-tree, that towered over the tent, rested three guns. Two of them were rifles, of which one was much longer than the other: the third piece was a double-barrelled shot gun. Bullet-pouches and powder-horns hung from the muzzles of all three, their straps being suspended from the projecting ends of the rammers.

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

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

First, then, were our heroes, the three Boy Hunters—Basil, Lucien, François. Basil was engaged by the tent, driving in the pins; Lucien was attending to the fire which he has just kindled; while François was making the feathers fly out of a brace of wild pigeons he had shot on the way. No two of the three were dressed alike. Basil was all buckskin—except the cap, which was made from the skin of a raccoon, with

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

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

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

Out near the middle of the glade were three horses picketed on lasso-ropes, so that they might not interfere with each other whilst browsing. They were very different in appearance. One was a large brown-black horse—a half-Arab—evidently endowed with great strength and spirit. That was Basil's horse, and deservedly a favourite. His name was "Black Hawk"—so called after the famous chief of the Sacs and Foxes, who was a friend of the old Colonel, and who had once entertained the latter when on a visit to these Indians. The second horse was a very plain one, a bay,

of the kind known as “cot.” He was a modest, sober animal, with nothing either of the hunter or warrior in his looks; but sleek withal, and in good condition, like a well-fed citizen. Hence his name, which was “Le Bourgeois.” Of course he was ridden by the quiet Lucien. The third horse might have been termed a pony—if size be considered—as he was by far the smallest of the three. He was a horse, however, both in shape and character—one of that small but fiery breed taken by the Spanish conquerors to the New World, and now known throughout the western country as “mustangs.” As I shall have reason to say more of these beautiful creatures by and by, I shall only state here, that the one in question was spotted like a pard, and answered to the name “Le Chat” (the cat)—particularly when François called him, for he was François’ horse.

A little apart from the horses was another animal, of a dirty slate colour, with some white marks along the back and shoulders. That was a true-bred Mexican mule, wiry and wicked as any of its race. It was a she-mule, and was called Jeanette. Jeanette was tethered beyond kicking distance of the horses; for between her and the mustang there existed no friendly feeling. Jeanette was the owner of the odd-looking saddle—the pack. Jeanette’s duty was to carry the tent, the provisions, the implements, and utensils.

But one other living object might be noticed in the glade—the dog “Marengo.” From his size and colour—which was tawny red—you might have mistaken him for a panther—a cougar. His long black muzzle and broad hanging ears gave him quite a different appearance, however; and told you that he was a hound. He was, in fact, a blood-hound, with the cross of a mastiff—a powerful animal. He was crouching near François, watching for the offal of the birds.

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

Chapter Six.

A Fox-Squirrel in a Fix.

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

“What a pity,” said he, “we have no vegetables!”

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

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

“Ha!” cried François, who at once recognised them, “what luck! pomme-blanche, and wild onions too, as I live! Now I shall make a soup worth tasting.”

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

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

While thus enjoying their pigeon-soup and picking the bones of the plump birds, the attention of all three was suddenly arrested by a movement near one side of the

glade. They had just caught a glimpse of something that looked like a flash of yellow light shooting up in a straight direction from the ground.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Whilst Basil and François were preparing their guns, the squirrel had made a second rush to the top of this limb; where it sat itself down in a fork, and appeared to contemplate the setting sun. No better mark could have been desired for a shot,

provided they could get near enough; and that they were likely to do, for the little animal did not appear to regard the presence either of them or their horses—thus showing that it had never been hunted. With its bushy tail erect, and spread like a fan, it sat upon its haunches, appearing to enjoy the warm beams that came from the west.

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

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

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

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

Lucien had scarcely spoken, when the hawk, that had hitherto been sailing with his broad wings expanded, suddenly narrowed his tail, drew in his wings, and came down with a loud “whish–sh–sh!” He dropped almost perpendicularly, grazing the squirrel so closely, that all three looked for it in his talons as he flew off again. Not so, however. The squirrel had been upon his guard; and, as the hawk swooped down,

had doubled around the tree with the quickness of a flash of lightning. By the guidance of his rudder-like tail the hawk soon turned, and flew round to that side of the tree on which the squirrel had now settled. A few strokes of his powerful wings soon enabled him to reach the proper elevation; and again he swooped downward at his intended victim. The squirrel avoided him as before, and came back on the other side of the trunk. Again the hawk doubled, rose, darted downward at his prey, missed it, and swept on. A fourth attempt met with like success, and the bird once more flew back into the air, but still kept circling over the tree.

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

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

This was, in fact, the situation in which the squirrel was. It was evident he regarded the trees at some distance with a wistful and anxious look; for, although he had succeeded so far in baffling his enemy, he still appeared to suffer from suspense and fear.

As soon as the hawk had risen a dozen yards or so above the tree, he again commenced wheeling in circles, uttering a strange cry as he flew. It was not a scream—as is often heard with these birds—but a cry of different import, as if a call to some comrade. It was so in fact, for in a moment it was answered from a distant part of the woods; and the next moment, another hawk—red-tailed like himself, but much larger—was seen soaring upwards. This was evidently his mate—for the female of these birds is always much larger than the males. The two soon came together, and wheeled above the tree, crossing each other’s orbit, and looking

downward. The squirrel now appeared doubly terrified—for he well knew their intent. He began to run around the trunk, looking outward at intervals, as though he intended to leap off and take to the thick woods.

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

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

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

Chapter Seven.

François gets an Ugly Fall.

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

The spot chosen for the camp was an open space upon the bank, at a point where the bayou widened into a small lake. The situation commanded a view of the shores of this lake all round—and a singular view that was. Giant trees rose over the water—live oaks and cypresses—and from their spreading branches the Spanish moss hung trailing down like long streamers of silver thread. This gave the upper part of the woods a somewhat hoary appearance, and would have rendered the scene rather a melancholy one, had it not been for the more brilliant foliage that relieved it. Here and there a green magnolia glistened in the sun, with its broad white flowers, each of them as large as a dining-plate. Underneath grew the thick cane (arundo gigantea), its tall pale-green reeds standing parallel to each other, and ending in lance-shaped blades, like stalks of giant wheat before its ears have shot. Over this again rose the grey limbs of the tupeloo-tree (nyssa aquatica), with light leaves and thin foliage. The beautiful palmetto (chamaerops) lifted its fan-like branches, as if to screen the earth from the hot sun that poured down upon it, and here and there its singular shapes were shadowed in the water. From tree to tree huge parasites stretched like cables—vines, and lianas, and various species of convolvulus. Some of these were covered with thick foliage, while others exhibited a surface of splendid flowers. The scarlet cups of the trumpet-vine (bignonia), the white starlike blossoms of the cypress-creeper, and the pink flowers of the wild althea or cotton-rose (hibiscus grandiflora), all blended their colours, inviting the large painted butterflies and ruby-throated humming birds that played among their silken corollas. As if in contrast with these bright spots in the landscape, there were others that looked dark

and gloomy. You could see through long vistas in the forest, where the trees grew out of green slimy water. Here there was no underwood, either of cane or palmettoes. The black trunks of the cypresses rose branchless for nearly an hundred feet, and from their spreading limbs drooped the grey weeping moss. Huge “knees” could be distinguished shooting up like cones or trees that had been broken off leaving their broken trunks in the ground. Sometimes a huge creeper, a foot or more in diameter, stretched across these gloomy aisles, as though a monster serpent were passing from tree to tree.

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

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

appearing in the distance like flocks of white sheep.

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

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

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

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

When the meal was over, Basil again looked to repairing the harness of the mule—that had got out of order on the march—while Lucien drew out his note-book and pencil, and, sitting down upon a buffalo-robe, commenced entering his

observations for the day. François having no employment, resolved upon creeping around the edge of the bayou, to have a shot at the flamingoes, if he should be lucky enough to get near them. This he knew would be no easy matter, but he had made up his mind to try it; and, having told his brothers of his intention, he shouldered his gun and went off.

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

He had not been out of sight more than five minutes, when Basil and Lucien were startled by the report of a gun, and then another following quickly after. They knew it was François' fowling-piece; but what had he fired at? It could not have been the flamingoes, as he had not had time to get within range of them. Besides, the birds, where they had been sitting on the far shore, were visible from the camp; and all of them, affrighted by the reports, were now seen winging their way over the tops of the trees. No, it could not have been at the flamingoes François had fired. What then? This was the question which Basil and Lucien put to each other, not without some feelings of anxiety. Perhaps, thought they, François has sprung a deer, or trampled up a flock of turkeys? So the brothers were fain to conjecture; but their conjectures were soon ended by François himself, who was heard far off through the woods, shouting in a fearful manner.

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

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

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

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

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

The bear—who would otherwise have left the alligator to himself—became so infuriated at this unprovoked assault, that he turned and sprang upon his new enemy, seizing him round the body in a firm hug. Both struggled over the ground, the one growling and snorting, while the other uttered a sound like the routing of a bull.

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

Chapter Eight.

About Alligators.

The boys now returned to their tent, impressed with curious feelings by the scene they had just witnessed. They lay down upon the grass, and entered into a conversation, of which bears and alligators formed the subjects. The latter, however, with their singular and revolting habits, came in for the greater share of their talk. Many odd stories in relation to them were known to all, even to the little François; and Basil being an old hunter among the swamps and bayous, was acquainted with many of the habits of these animals. But Basil was not much of an observer; and he

had only noticed such peculiarities as, from time to time, were forced upon his attention by the incidents of the chase. Lucien, however, had more closely observed their habits, and had also studied them from books. He was, therefore, well acquainted with all that is known to the naturalist concerning these animals; and at the request of his brothers he consented to while away the twilight hours, by imparting to them such information about them as he himself possessed.

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

“How many species in all?” demanded Basil.

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

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

“They are,” answered Lucien, “very similar in their characteristics.”

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

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

“Who made them, then?” asked François.

“Who!” exclaimed Lucien, with some warmth; “who but closet-naturalists, old mummy-hunters of museums! Bah! it makes one angry.”

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

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

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

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

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

“His name will live for ever.”

“Ay, that it will, when many of the philosophic naturalists, now so much talked of, shall be forgotten, or only remembered to have their quaint theories laughed at, and their fabulous descriptions turned into ridicule. Fortunately for Wilson, he was too poor and too humble to attract their patronage until his book was published. Fortunately for him he knew no great Linneus or Count Buffon, else the vast stores which he had been at so much pains to collect would have been given to the world under another name. Look at Bartram.”

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

“Nor I,” added Basil.

“There it is, you see. Few know his name; and yet this same John Bartram, a farmer of Pennsylvania, who lived an hundred years ago, did more to spread, not only a knowledge of American plants, but the plants themselves, than any one who has lived since. Most of the great gardens of England—Kew among the rest—are indebted to this indefatigable botanist for their American flora; and there were few of the naturalists of that time—Linneus not excepted—that were not largely indebted to him for their facts and their fame. They took his plants and specimens—collected by arduous, toilsome, and perilous journeyings—they put names to them—noble and kingly names—for king-sycophants most of them were, these same naturalists—they described them as they call it—such descriptions, indeed! and then adopted them as their own discoveries. And what did they give John Bartram in return for all his trouble? Why, the English king gave him 50 pounds to enable him to travel over thousands of miles of wilderness in search of rare plants, many of which on reaching England were worth hundreds of pounds each! This was all the poor botanist had for enriching the gardens of Kew, and sending over the first magnolias and tulip-trees that ever blossomed in England! What did the scientific naturalists do for him? They stole his histories and descriptions, and published them under their own names. Now, brothers, what think you of it? Is it not enough to spoil one’s temper when one reflects upon such injustice?”

Both Basil and François signified their assent.

“It is to such men as Hearne, and Bartram, and Wilson, that we are indebted for all we know of natural history—at least, all that is worth knowing. What to us is the dry knowledge of scientific classifications? For my part, I believe that the authors of them have obscured rather than simplified the knowledge of natural history. Take an

example. There is one before our eyes. You see those long streamers hanging down from the live oaks?”

“Yes, yes,” replied François; “the Spanish moss.”

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

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

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

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

“Well, then,” said Lucien, returning to his natural tone and manner, “as I have already said, the crocodiles are divided into three genera—crocodiles, gavials, and alligators. It is Baron Cuvier who has made this distinction; and he rests it more

upon the shape of the head and the set of the teeth, than upon any real difference in the appearance or habits of these animals. The crocodiles have long, pointed, narrow snouts, and a large tooth in each side of the lower jaw, which, when the mouth shuts, passes into a groove in the upper. ‘These are the true crocodiles,’ says Monsieur Cuvier. The gavials have also long, pointed, narrow, roundish snouts, but their teeth are nearly equal-sized and even. The alligators, on the contrary, have broad pike-shaped noses, with teeth very unequal, and one large one on each side of the lower jaw, that, when the mouth shuts, passes—not into a groove as with the crocodile—but, into a hole or socket in the upper jaw. These are Monsieur Cuvier’s distinctions; which he takes a world of pains to point out and prove. He might, in my opinion, have spared himself the trouble, as there are so few varieties of the animal in existence, that they might have been treated of with greater simplicity as so many species of the genus ‘crocodile.’

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

“Now I think it is a well-ascertained fact, that all these varieties of the crocodile family have pretty much the same habits,—differing only where such difference

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

“All these things you may observe by looking at an alligator. But there are some things about the structure of the animal which are peculiar, and which may not strike you so readily. You observe that his jaws open far back—even beyond the ears—where they are hinged or articulated into each other. Now this is a peculiar formation, and the effect is, that when the alligator opens his mouth, his neck becomes somewhat bent upwards, giving him the appearance of having moved the upper instead of the under jaw.”

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

“Many have thought so, and said so, since the time of Herodotus, who first propagated this absurd idea. It is not the fact, however. It is the lower jaw that moves, as in other vertebrated animals; but the appearance I have described leads to the mistake that has been made by careless observers. There is another point worth speaking of. The opening of the alligator’s ear is guarded by a pair of lips, which he

closes the moment he goes under water. His nostrils, too, are protected by valves, which he can also close at will. There is also a peculiarity about his vertebrae. These are so jointed to each other, that he cannot turn without describing a circle with his body. He can move his head but slightly to one side or the other; and this is a fortunate circumstance, if not for him, at least for his enemies. Were he able to turn short round, or twist himself about, as serpents do, he would be a most dangerous creature to encounter. As it is, the great length of his body, combined with the shortness of his legs and the impossibility of his getting round quickly, renders him an easy antagonist on land, provided you keep out of reach of his great jaws, and beyond the sweep of his powerful tail. This last is his true weapon of offence or defence; and as it is not restrained by any vertebrae, he can use it with such effect as to knock the breath out of a man with one single flap. Many of the habits of the alligator are known to you. How the female lays eggs as big as those of a goose, and buries them in the sand, where they are hatched by the heat of the sun. Sometimes she cannot find a sandbank to suit her purpose. She then raises a circular platform of mud mixed with grass and sticks. Upon this she deposits a layer of eggs, and covers them over with several inches of mud and grass. She then lays a fresh tier of eggs, covering these also with mud, and so on until she has laid her whole hatching, which often amounts to nearly two hundred eggs, of a dirty greenish-white colour. In the end she covers all up with mud, plastering it with her tail until it assumes the appearance of a mud oven or beaver-house. All these pains she takes to protect her eggs from raccoons and turtles, as well as vultures and other birds, that are very fond of them. She haunts near the spot while the eggs are hatching, so as to keep off these enemies. When the young are out, her first care is to get them to the water out of the way of such dangers. This seems to be their first instinct, too; for no sooner are they free from the shell than they are seen scuttling off in that direction, or following their mother, many of them having climbed upon her back and shoulders."

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

young?"

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

"And I," said Basil, "several times."

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

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

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

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

"It is very true," replied Lucien, "that they will eat dogs, as they will any other

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

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

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

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

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

"By what stratagem?"

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

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

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

and then, taking sure aim, he strikes the unconscious prey a ‘slap’ that kills it at once—sometimes throwing it directly into his jaws, and sometimes flinging it several feet out of the water!

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

“But, brother,” inquired Basil, “why do the alligators eat stones and such substances? I have seen one that was opened, and his stomach was nearly quarter full of stones as big as my fist, and pieces of sticks and glass. They looked as if they had been there a long time, for the sharp edges were worn off. This I never could understand.”

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

crawl off and live for days after. Instances have been known of alligators having had their brains blown out by a shot, and yet for hours after they would give battle to any one who might approach them. Their brain, like that of all reptiles, is exceedingly small—proving them lower in the scale of intelligence than birds and mammals."

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

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

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

"And if you did, you would, in all probability, be attacked before you could reach the opposite shore. But our alligators are not now what they were an hundred years ago. We know, from the best authority, that they were then much more fierce and dangerous, and often attacked men without provocation. They have grown afraid of us, because they know that we are dangerous to them; and they can easily distinguish our upright form and shape from those of other animals. Look how they have been hunted by men during the mania for alligator-leather, and see how many of them are still killed for their oil and tails. It is quite natural, then, they should fear us; and you may notice they are much more timid near the plantations and settlements than in the wilder parts. I have no doubt—and I have so heard it—that there are places in the great swamps where they are still dangerous to approach.

Those who assert that the African crocodiles are more fierce, do not draw their conclusions from facts. The caïmans of South America—and these are alligators—are quite as fierce as the crocodiles. I have read many accounts of their attacking the natives of Guiana and Brazil, and devouring them, too. Much of this is fabulous, no doubt; but there are some stories of the kind well authenticated, and I have heard one which I am certain is true. I shall relate it, if you desire, though it is a very horrible and very melancholy tale, and I could well wish it had not been true."

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

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

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

Chapter Nine.

The Indian Mother and Caïman.

"There is, perhaps, no part of America where the alligators grow to a greater size, and are more fierce in their nature, than upon the Magdalena, and other great rivers that run into it. These rivers flow through a low country within the tropics; their climate is of the hottest kind, and consequently most suitable to the development of the great reptiles. The indolent character of the natives, too—half-Indian, half-Spanish—prevents them from attacking and destroying these creatures with that energy that is exhibited by the inhabitants of our own country. The consequence is, that the animals in their turn are less afraid of man, and often make him their prey. The alligators of the Magdalena—or 'caïmans,' as they are there called—frequently destroy natives, who by any unlucky accident may have fallen into the waters frequented by them. Not unfrequently the boatmen (bogadores) who navigate the river Magdalena in their bogas, or flat boats, drop overboard, and become the prey

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

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

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

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

“On reaching the spot, the woman filled her vessels with water, and commenced her work; while the child, having nothing else to occupy her, began to gather some ripe guavas, plucking them from a tree that grew out from the bank, and hung somewhat over the river. While the Indian mother was thus engaged, she was startled by a wild scream and a plunge, that were heard almost together; and, on looking round, she saw her child just sinking in the water. At the same time, she beheld a hideous object—a huge caïman—making for the spot! Filled with horror, the woman dropped her linen, and rushed out upon the bank. She did not hesitate a moment, but plunged into the river, which buried her to the neck. At that moment the child rose again to the surface. The mother seized her by the arms; and was about raising her out of the water, when the caïman swept forward open-mouthed, caught the limbs of the little girl, and with one crunch of his powerful jaws severed them from the body! The little girl screamed again; but it was her last scream. When the mother struggled to the shore, and laid the mutilated body upon the bank, the child had ceased to breathe.

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

bushes, swam the hideous reptile, to and fro. He had swallowed the morsel, and was eagerly watching for more.

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

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

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

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

“The caïmans do not masticate their food. Their teeth are not formed for that. They are only made for seizing; and the tongue—which they cannot extend

forward—only serves to assist them in swallowing. In a few moments the body had disappeared down the capacious throat of the monster. The Indian Mother and Caiman Seeing this, the woman suddenly sprang to her feet, and dragged violently upon the rope, and the next moment a wild scream announced that she had succeeded in her intentions. The barbed blades had taken hold, and the caïman was secured!

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

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

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

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

“And a painful incident it was,” cried Basil, with some excitement. “Thunder! it makes one hate those monsters so I feel like having a shot at one this very moment; besides I want a tooth for a powder-charger;” and as he said this, he took up his rifle, and stepped out to the water’s edge. None of the alligators appeared to be within

range at the moment, though dozens of them were seen moving about on the bayou.

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

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

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

Basil and François now showed themselves—as they did not care to waste their ammunition by shooting any more—and the rest of the alligators, seeing them, swam off faster than they had come. By the aid of Lucien’s hatchet, the largest teeth were knocked out of the jaws of the one that had been killed; and the horrid carcass was left where it lay, to feed the wolves and vultures, or anything else that chose to make a meal of it.

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

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

Chapter Ten.

The Food of the Silkworm.

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

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

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

There was a freshet in the Sabine; but they swam across it, as they had done other rivers, and halted to encamp upon its western bank. It was still only a little after noon, but as they had wet their baggage in crossing, they resolved to remain by the river for the rest of the day. They made their camp in an open space in the midst of a grove of low trees. There were many open spaces, for the trees stood wide apart, and the grove looked very much like a deserted orchard. Here and there a tall magnolia raised its cone-shaped summit high above the rest, and a huge trunk of one of these,

without leaves or branches, appeared at some distance, standing like an old ruined tower.

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

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

The sun was shining brightly, and they proceeded to spread their wet robes and blankets.

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

“Why do you think so?” asked Basil.

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

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

“Do you not observe anything odd in their species?”

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

and those great magnolias. I have seen all these trees before."

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

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

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

"But, brother Luce," interposed François, "I never heard that the Indians of these parts made such settlements as this must have been. These low woods extend down the river for miles. They must have had a large tract under cultivation."

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

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

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

"How came that about?"

"No one can tell. Some of the old Spanish authors say that they were destroyed by Indians from South America. This story, however, is very absurd—as is, indeed, most of what has been written by these same old Spanish authors, whose books read more like the productions of children than of reasoning men. It is far more likely that the Natchez were conquered by the Creeks and Chicasaws, who came from the south-west of their country; and that the remnant of their tribe became blended with

and lost among the conquerors. In my opinion, this is how they have come to be extinct. Why, then, should not this be one of their ancient settlements, and these trees the remains of their orchards, cultivated by them for their fruits and other uses?"

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

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

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

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

"Would it not be interesting, Basil," said François, appealing to his elder brother, "if Lucien would give a botanical description of all these trees, and tell us their uses? He knows all that."

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

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

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

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

“First, then, comes the white mulberry (Morus alia). It is the most important species yet known. This you will readily admit when I tell you that from it comes all our silk—spun out of it by the silkworm (Bombyx mori). It is called white mulberry on account of the colour of its fruit, which, however, is not always white, but sometimes of a purple or black colour. Now it would be difficult to give an exact description of a white mulberry-tree; for, like the apple and pear trees, there are many varieties of it produced from the same seeds, and also by difference of soil and climate. It is a small tree, however, rarely growing over forty feet high, with thick leaves and numerous branches. The leaves are the most important part of it—for it is upon these the silkworms feed, spinning their fine threads out of the milky juice, which in its properties resembles the juice of the caoutchouc tree. It is true that the silkworm will feed upon the other species of mulberries, and also upon slippery

elms, figs, lettuce, beets, endive, and many kinds of leaves besides; but the silk made from all these is of an inferior quality; and even the varieties of the white mulberry itself produce different qualities of this beautiful material.

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

“The white mulberry, it is supposed, first came from China, where it is still found growing wild; and the Chinese first cultivated it for feeding silkworms as early as 2700 years before the Christian era. The tree is now found in every civilised country, growing either as an ornament of the shrubbery, or for the manufacture of silk.

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

from these mulberries—which must be drunk while it is new, as it soon turns to vinegar. This fruit is good for fevers and rheumatisms; and it is much sought after by birds and all kinds of poultry, who devour it greedily.

“So much for the white and black mulberry-tree. We now come to the third species, the red (Morus rubra).

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

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

“There is still a fourth species of this genus, called the paper mulberry (Morus papyrifera). This, however, has been separated by botanists into another genus; but it is worth a word here, as it is a very curious and valuable tree, or, rather, a large shrub, for it does not grow so tall as either of the other three. It is a native of China, Japan, and the islands of the Pacific Ocean; but, like the others, it is cultivated for ornament both in Europe and America. Its fruit, which is of a scarlet colour, is globe-shaped, and not oblong, as that of the true mulberries; and this is one reason why it has been separated into a genus by itself. Its leaves are of no use for

silk-making, but they make excellent food for cattle; and as the tree grows rapidly, and carries such large bunches of leaves, some people have said that it would yield better than grass, and should be cultivated for pasture. I do not know whether this has been tried yet. The most interesting part of the paper mulberry is its bark, which is used in the manufacture of paper both in China and Japan. The beautiful India paper used for engravings is made from it, and so, too, is the fine white cloth worn by the natives of the Society Islands, and which so much astonished Europeans when they first saw it. It would be interesting to detail the process of manufacturing this cloth as well as the paper, but it would take up too much of our time at present.

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

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

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

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

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

These incidents are recorded in the chapter which follows.

Chapter Eleven.

The Chain of Destruction.

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

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

“Voilà! look yonder—humming-birds!”

Now the sight of humming-birds is not so common in America as travellers would have you believe. Even in Mexico, where the species are numerous, you will not see them every day. Indeed, you may not notice them at all, unless you are specially looking for them. They are such small creatures, and fly so nimbly—darting from flower to flower and tree to tree—that you may pass along without observing them, or perhaps mistake them for bees. In the United States, however, where only one species has yet been noticed, the sight is a rare one, and generally interesting to those who witness it. Hence François’ exclamation was one of surprise and pleasure.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I see no others,” said François, after a pause.

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

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

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

“I can shoot them with small shot.”

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

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

As he stood watching them a large humble-bee (Apis bombylicus) came whizzing

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

A shout from François now told that the nest was discovered. There it was, in the fork of a low branch, but without eggs as yet—else the birds would not both have been abroad. The nest was examined by all three, though they did not disturb it from its position. It was built of fine threads of Spanish moss (Tillandsia), with which it was tied to the branch; and it was lined inside with the silken down of the anemone. It was a semi-sphere, open at the top, and but one inch in diameter. In fact, so small was the whole structure, that any one but the sharp-eyed, bird-catching, nest-seeking François, would have taken it for a knob on the bark of the tree.

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

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

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

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

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

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

This was evident. Step by step, and leap after leap, it was approaching the cluster of blossoms where the humming-bird was at the moment engaged. Its eyes were bent eagerly upon the latter; and whenever it flew up from the flowers and whirred idly about, the tarantula squatted itself closely, hiding behind the leaves or shanks of the vines. On the other hand, when the bird settled a moment and appeared busily feeding, the skulking creature would advance a stage nearer, either by a quick run or a leap, when it would again conceal itself and await a fresh opportunity. As the bird flitted about a good deal, the spider had frequently to change its direction in following. The former after one of its short flights, settled into a pet-flower directly in front of where the latter lay crouching. It did not enter the cup of the flower, but remained at the mouth—poised upon its whirring wings—while with its long prehensile tongue it drew out the honey. It had scarcely been a moment in this

position, when the tarantula sprang forward and clutched it round the body with his antennae. The bird, with a wild chirrup, like that of a distressed cricket, flew outward and upwards. Its wings were still free, and all expected it would carry off the spider that was now seen clinging around it. Not so, however. On getting a few feet from the flower its flight appeared to be suddenly checked; and, although it still kept in the air, flying first one way and then another, it was evident that something restrained it from getting clear off. On looking more attentively a fine silk-like line was seen stretching from the trees to the fluttering creature. It was the thread of the spider, and this it was that prevented his victim from carrying him into the air.

The little wings soon ceased to move, and both bird and spider fell to the end of the thread, where they hung for a moment suspended. The boys could see that the bird was dead, and the mandibles of the tarantula were buried in its shining threat!

François would have rushed forward to kill the destroyer; but Lucien, who was too ardent a naturalist to have his lesson thus interrupted, restrained his more impetuous brother, and all three remained quiet as before.

The tarantula now commenced reeling in his line, for the purpose of carrying his prey up among the branches, where he had his nest. The boys looked upward to discover the latter. There, sure enough, was the web, in a shaded corner, stretching its meshes from a large liana to the trunk of the tupelo; and towards this point the spider now slowly progressed with his lifeless victim.

As they watched his motions, their eyes were caught by a shining object that moved along the wrinkled bark of the liana. As the vine was nearly a foot in diameter, and of a deep ferruginous colour, this object was the more apparent against its dark ground, for it was a creature of brilliant hues. It was an animal of the lizard species; and if any lizard could be considered beautiful, this one might have been so called. But the hideous, half-human form of these animals, their piercing looks, their stealthy and predatory habits, and, above all, the knowledge that the bite of several

of their species is poisonous, combine to render them objects that excite disgust and awe, rather than admiration.

This one, as we have already said, was of the most brilliant colour. The whole of its upper surface was a golden green, vivid as the hues of an emerald; while its body underneath was greenish-white. But this part, as it lay along the liana, was not seen; and a pure, uniform green was the apparent colour of the whole animal. There was one conspicuous exception—the throat. This was swollen out, as though by inflation, exhibiting a surface of the brightest scarlet, that appeared in the sun as if painted with vermilion. The eyes of the animal shone like flame—for the irides were, in fact, the colour of burnished gold, with small pupils, sparkling like diamonds, in their midst. Its arms and limbs were of the same colour as the body; and its branching feet exhibited the peculiarity of having small knots or tubercules at the ends of the toes. These tubercules, together with the loose dewlap of the throat, told the genus to which the animal belonged,—an anolius of the family Iguanidae, and the only species of the anolius found in the territory of the United States.

These facts were communicated by Lucien to his brothers in a whisper, while they were observing the creature on the liana. Basil and François had often seen the species before, and were familiar with it under the names of “green lizard” and “chameleon,”—both of which names are applied to it in common phraseology. The animal was not over six inches in length; and its long coffin-shaped head, and slender, whip-like tail, were at least two-thirds of this extent. When first noticed, it was passing up the liana, for the latter slanted upwards between the trees. It did not see the boys; or, at all events, did not regard their presence—for the chameleon is a bold little animal, and is not afraid of man. Up to this time it had not seen the tarantula either. As it was passing onward, its eyes fell upon the latter as he climbed up his silken ladder. All at once the lizard stopped, and put itself into a crouching attitude. Its colour suddenly changed. The vermilion throat became white, and then ashy pale; and the bright green of its body faded into dark brown or rust colour, until

it was difficult to distinguish the animal from the bark of the liana! Had the eyes of the spectators not been already fixed upon it, they might have supposed that it had disappeared altogether. After crouching for a few seconds, it seemed to have formed its plan of attack—for it was evident that it meant to attack the spider—such, with flies and other insects, being its natural food and prey. It passed to the opposite side of the liana, and then proceeded upward, making for the nest of the tarantula. It reached this point by a single run, although its back was downward as it crawled. This it could easily do by means of the tubercules upon its toes—which enable lizards of the genus anolius to walk upon perpendicular walls, up glass windows, or along the smoothest ceilings.

For some moments it lay quiet in a crouching attitude, waiting the approach of the spider, that, busied with his own affairs, did not dream of a lurking foe so near him. The tarantula was, no doubt, in high spirits at the moment, exulting at the prospect of the banquet of blood he should have, when he had carried the ruby-throat to his dark, silken cave. But he was destined never to reach that cave. When he had got within a few inches of its entrance, the chameleon sprang out from the limb, seized the spider in his wide jaws, and all three—lizard, spider, and bird—came to the ground together. The bird was let go in the fall, and became separated from the others. Between these there was a short struggle over the grass—for the tarantula fought fiercely; but he was no match for his antagonist; who, in a few moments, had ground off his legs with his powerful jaws, and left him a helpless and motionless trunk. The chameleon now seized his victim by the head, sunk his sharp, conical teeth into its skull, and thus killed it outright.

What appeared singular to all was, that the moment the lizard had first sprung upon his prey his bright colours returned like a flash, and he again appeared with his green back and red throat, if possible more brilliant than ever.

He now commenced dragging the body of the spider over the grass, evidently

making for some decayed logs, half covered with vines and briars, that formed a heap near the spot. Here, no doubt was his retreat.

This time François did not attempt to interfere. He had no desire to do so. He looked upon the death of the tarantula as a just punishment; moreover, the chameleon, from its fine colours, its sportive habits, and its harmlessness—so far as man is concerned—is a general favourite with all; and it was so with François. In fact, François, as well as his brothers, who had often watched this little creature gambolling among the leaves, and feeding upon flies and other small insects, had never seen it exhibit so much ferocity before. Notwithstanding this, they all applauded it for killing the hideous tarantula; and so far as they were concerned, it might have carried the body to its hole without being molested. It was destined, however, to meet with interruption from another quarter. François, whose quick eyes were wandering about, suddenly exclaimed,—

“Look—brothers, look! A scorpion-lizard!”

Basil and Lucien cast their eyes where François pointed—up to the trunk of a tree that rose over the spot where the chameleon was crawling. About twenty feet from the ground was a dark, round hole, evidently the former nest of the red-bellied woodpecker (Picus Carolinus). The birds, however, who made that nest had deserted it; for it was now occupied by a creature of a far different kind—a scorpion-lizard—whose red head and brown shoulders at the moment protruded from the hole.

All who have travelled the great American forests are familiar with such a sight—for this animal may be often observed in similar situations. A more disagreeable sight is rarely met with. The scorpion-lizard, with his red head and olive-brown body, is a hideous-looking reptile at best; but when thus peering from his gloomy tree-cave, moving his pointed snout from side to side, his dark eyes glancing all the while with a fierce, malignant expression, it is difficult to conceive a

more vicious-looking creature.

His head was in motion when François spake—for it was this that had caught the eye of the boy. It was moving from side to side, protruded out from the hole, the snout pointing downwards. The animal was watching the ground below, and evidently preparing to issue forth, and come down. The chameleon, rustling over the dead leaves, had attracted his attention.

As quick as lightning his whole body appeared upon the tree, and lay flat along the bark, head downwards. Here he halted for a moment; then, raising his shoulders, he ran nimbly down the trunk, and rushing outwards, sprang upon the chameleon. The latter, thus suddenly attacked, dropped the spider; and at first showed an intention of retreating. Had he done so the scorpion would have followed him no farther—as its only object in attacking him was to rob him of his prey. The chameleon, however, is a courageous little animal; and seeing that his assailant was not much bigger than himself—for the animal in question was one of the smallest of the skink family—he turned again and showed fight. His throat swelled to its largest extent, and grew brighter than ever.

Both now stood facing each other, and about twelve inches apart, in threatening attitudes. Their eyes sparkled; their forked tongues shot forth, glittering in the sun; and their heads at intervals rose and fell, in a manoeuvring manner, like a pair of pugilists “coming to the scratch!”

After a short while they sprang at each other open-jawed; wriggled over the ground a moment—their tails flying in the air—then separated, and again assumed their defiant attitudes, manoeuvring as before. In this manner they met and parted several times, neither seeming to have gained much advantage.

The weakest part of the green lizard lies in his tail. So tender is this appendage that the slightest blow of a small switch will separate it from the body. The skink seemed to be aware of this fact, as he several times endeavoured to get around his

antagonist, or, in military phraseology, to “turn” him. It was evidently his intention to attack the tail. This the chameleon dreaded; and was equally desirous not to be “outflanked.” In whatever way the skink manoeuvred, his antagonist met him with his scarlet front.

For several minutes the battle raged—these little creatures exhibiting as much fury and fierceness as if they had been a pair of great crocodiles. The chameleon at length began to show symptoms of giving out. The throat grew paler—the green became less vivid—and it was evident that he was getting the worst of it. The scorpion now made a rush, and threw the other upon his back. Before the chameleon could recover himself, his antagonist seized his tail, and bit it off close to the body. The poor little fellow, feeling that he had lost more than half his length, scuttled away, and hid himself among the logs.

It was well for him, as it proved afterwards, that he got off, even thus mutilated; and it would have been better for the skink had he remained in his hole. The battle between the two had carried them some distance from the spot where it first commenced, and under the leafy, spreading branches of a mulberry-tree. While the fight was raging, a slight movement in the leaves above had attracted the attention of the boys. The next moment a red object was thrust downward, until a foot or so of it appeared hanging clear of the branches. It was about the thickness of a walking-cane; but the glistening scales and the elegant curving form told that this singular object was a serpent.

It did not remain stationary. It was slowly and gradually letting itself down—for more of its body was every moment becoming visible, until a full yard of it hung out from the leaves. The remainder was hidden by the thick foliage where its tail no doubt was coiled around a branch. That part of the body that was seen was of a uniform blood-red colour, though the belly or under side was much the lightest.

“Voilà!” muttered François, “what a red snake! I never saw such before.”

“Nor I either,” added Basil.

“Nor I,” said Lucien, “but I have heard of it. I easily recognise it from the description. It is the ‘red snake’ of the Rocky Mountains (Coluber testacea).”

“Oh,” said Basil, “I have heard trappers speak of it.”

“Yes,” added Lucien. “It is a rare species, and only found in the Far West. See! the scorpion has whipped. The chameleon is running off, and, as I live, without its tail!”

The skink at this moment perceived the long, red body of the serpent dangling above him; and knowing from experience a terrible enemy, ran off, endeavouring to hide himself in the grass. Instead of making for a tree—where he might have escaped by his superior nimbleness—his confusion and terror led him out into the open ground. The snake dropped from the mulberry and glided after, with his head raised high in the air, and his jaws wide open. In a second or two he overtook the lizard; and striking forward and downward, killed it upon the spot.

Lucien was in raptures with the interesting lesson he was receiving; and again restrained François from rushing forward. They all, however, crept a little nearer—so as the better to observe the further movements of the serpent. They kept as well as possible behind the screen of leaves and bushes.

The snake, after having killed the lizard, remained out in the open ground; and, stretching himself along the grass, commenced devouring it. Snakes do not masticate their food. Their teeth are not formed for this, but only for seizing and killing. The blood-snake is not venomous, and is, therefore, without fangs such as venomous snakes possess. In lieu of these he possesses a double row of sharp teeth; and, like the “black snake,” the “whip,” and others of the genus coluber, he is extremely swift, and possesses certain powers of constriction, which are mostly wanting in serpents of the venomous tribes. Like all the others, he swallows his prey just as he kills it—whole. So with the one in question. Having placed the nose of the lizard vis-à-vis with his own, he opened his jaws to their full extent, took in the

head, and commenced gradually sucking the body down his throat. It was a curious operation; and the boys watched it with feelings of interest.

But other eyes were bent upon the reptile. His bright blood-coloured body lying along the grass had caught the far-seeing eye of an enemy, whose dark shadow was now seen moving over the ground. On looking up, the boys beheld a large bird wheeling in the air. Its snow-white head and breast, the far spread, tapering wings, but, above all, the long forked tail, told them at a glance what bird it was. It was the great Southern kite (Falco furcatus).

When first seen he was sailing in circles,—or rather in a spiral curve, that was constantly contracting downward and inward. The centre of that curve was the spot occupied by the snake.

It was a beautiful sight to behold this creature cutting the thin air. His flight was the beau idéal of ease and gracefulness—for in this no bird can equal the kite. Not a stroke of his long pointed wings betrayed that he needed their assistance; and he seemed to glory that he could navigate the air without them. Besides, the motion of these, had he used them, might have caught the eye of his intended victim, and warned it of the danger. I say it was a beautiful sight to watch him as he swam through his aery circles, at one moment appearing all white—as his breast was turned to the spectators—the next moment his black back and purple wings glittering in the sun, as sideways he guided himself down the spiral curve. It was a beautiful sight, and the young hunters stood gazing with silent admiration.

Basil and François wondered that he did not at once pounce upon the snake, for towards it his flight was evidently tending. They had seen other hawks do this—such as the red-tailed, the peregrine, and the osprey—which last sometimes shoots several hundred feet perpendicularly down upon its prey. Lucien, however, knew better. He knew that that feat can be performed only by those hawks whose tails are full and not forked, as the bald eagle, and the species already named—their spreading tails

giving them the power to suddenly arrest the downward motion, and prevent them from dashing themselves against the earth. The kites, on the other hand, have not that power; and in this arrangement Lucien could perceive a beautiful adaptation of Nature—an equalising of advantages between these two kinds of birds. He reasoned thus:—

The hawks, although swift of wing, and capable of extended flight, cannot remain long in the air. They grow weary and need rest, which they take, perching themselves upon some tree. It may be observed, moreover, that they choose dead trees that overlook an open space. They do so, in order that the leaves may not obstruct their vision—thus giving them a wider range, and, consequently, a better chance of espying their prey. But even with this advantage their chances of seeing their prey are circumscribed, when compared with that of hawks upon the wing; and they are frequently compelled to take to the air in order to discover it.

Now the kites are always in the air, or nearly so. They, in fact, live upon the wing, eating their food as they fly, from their claws. Living thus, they have many more chances of seeing their prey than their cousins of the hawk species; and were they possessed of the power to pounce upon it with as much certainty as the latter do, it is evident they would have greatly the advantage. The want of that capability, however, brings them upon an equality; and, as I have said, Lucien perceived in this that peculiar equilibrium, or “balance of power,” which constantly presents itself to the student of Nature.

These thoughts passed through his mind at the moment. They occupied but a moment however—for it was but a few seconds from the time the kite was first noticed wheeling high in the air, until he swept along the tops of the low trees, so close that the boys could distinguish the red iris of his glistening eyes.

Now, for the first time, the snake caught sight of him. Hitherto it had been too much occupied with its own prey, which it had succeeded in swallowing. The shadow of

the broad wings fell upon the sunlit sward directly before its eyes. It looked up, and saw its terrible enemy. It seemed to shiver through its whole length, and turn paler in colour. It struck its head into the grass, endeavouring to hide itself. It was too late. The kite swooped gently downward; and, with open claw, poised himself a moment over the spot. As he rose again, the reptile was seen wriggling in his talons!

A few strokes of his bold wing carried the kite upward, above the tops of the tallest trees; but he was observed to fly heavily. As he rose higher, the flapping of his wings became more hurried and irregular. It was evident that something was impeding his flight. The snake was no longer hanging from his talons. The reptile had twined itself around his body; and its glistening folds, like red bands, could be seen half-buried in the white plumage of the bird!

All at once the kite began to flutter—then one of his wings disappeared; and, notwithstanding the hurried flapping of the other, both bird and serpent fell heavily to the earth!

They fell close to the spot from whence they had risen. Neither was killed by the fall, nor, to all appearance, hurt; for, the moment after they had touched the ground, both were seen engaged in a violent struggle—the bird evidently endeavouring to free himself from the folds of the reptile, while the latter seemed equally bent upon holding him! The snake knew well that this was its only hope; for, should it unfold itself and endeavour to escape, it would only give the kite an opportunity of clutching it a second time, when he would be certain to do it with more fatal effect. It was because the reptile had buried its head in the grass that the kite had failed in seizing it properly by the neck, and putting an end to it at once.

This, no doubt, was the idea of the snake; but it is probable that its antagonist at the moment would have been delighted to “cry quits” with it, for the bird was in a worse “fix” than it was. As things stood, the serpent had undoubtedly the advantage.

It was likely to prove a protracted struggle; for, although there was much twisting

and wriggling over the ground, and flapping of the odd wing—that was still free—very little change for a long time appeared to take place in the relative position of the combatants. This could be seen, whenever they paused to rest themselves—which they did every two or three minutes.

How was it to end? The kite could not kill the snake, for he could not get at it, either with his beak or talons. The hold which he had at first taken he had lost, in his attempts to save himself from falling; and he was now unable to renew it, so closely was the reptile warped around him. The snake, on the other hand, could not kill the kite; for, although possessed of considerable powers of constriction, they were not sufficient. It was strong enough to hold, and, perhaps, squeeze its antagonist, but not strong enough to crush and kill him.

Though each, no doubt, at the moment wished to be far enough from the other, they could not separate with safety to both. The kite could not get away, and the snake dared not let him go!

How, then, was the affair to end, in the event that no third party should interfere? This was the conjecture of our adventurers, as with curious eyes they watched this singular contest. The train of reasoning was as follows:—

By one or the other dying of hunger. But which would starve first? It was well-known that the kite could live for days without food. Ha! but so too could the snake,—nay, more, for every day the bird could go without eating, the reptile could fast ten; besides, the snake had just dined—dined sumptuously upon the scorpion-lizard, that was now lying undigested in his stomach; whereas the kite had not tasted dinner,—nay, it was very certain he had not breakfasted either—and must have been very hungry indeed to have attempted preying upon a blood-snake full four feet long—for, as is well-known, his usual prey is the locust, the chameleon, and the little green snake (Coluber aestivus). Under every view of the question then, the snake had the advantage of the bird, and would easily outstarve him. Thus, then,

the affair would end, if the combatants were left to themselves.

The young hunters arrived at this conclusion; and, having watched the contest until their curiosity was satisfied, were about stepping forward to put an end to it, when a new manoeuvre on the part of the combatants caused them to remain still. The kite had got his beak close to the head of the serpent, and was striking with open mandibles, endeavouring to seize the jaw of the latter. He was upon his back—for these birds fight best in that position. The serpent, on the other hand, was trying his best to bite the bird; and for this purpose at intervals extended its jaws, showing the double rows of sharp conical teeth. At one of these intervals, while its mouth was open, the kite struck quickly upward, and seized the lower jaw of the reptile in his beak. The latter closed its mouth on the instant; but the horny mandible was impervious to its sharp teeth, and the bird regarded them not.

The kite continued to hold fast with his powerful beak. He had now gained the advantage, for which he had been all the while contending. He had got a “fulcrum for his lever,” and he was not slow in using it. Suddenly turning back upward, with the aid of his wing and one of his claws, he held himself fast to the ground, while with his strong neck he drew the head of the serpent close under him until it lay within reach of his other claw. Then with a quick fierce stroke he planted his talons, so as to encircle the throat of his adversary, clutching and holding it like a vice.

This manoeuvre put a period to the contest. The red coils were seen to loosen, then fall off; and, although the reptile still writhed, it was only in its death-struggles. In a few moments its body lay along the grass, powerless and without motion.

The kite after a short rest drew his beak from the jaws of the serpent, raised his head, extended his wings—to assure himself they were free—and, with a scream of triumph, rose upward, the long carcass of the reptile trailing after him like a train!

At this moment another scream reached the ears of the young hunters. It might have passed for the echo of the first, but its tones were wilder and louder. All eyes were

turned to the direction whence it came. The boys knew very well what sort of a creature had uttered it, for they had heard such notes before. They knew it was the white-headed eagle.

They caught sight of him the moment they turned. It was not difficult to see him soaring upward—his great tail and broad wings expanded, seven feet in extent, against the light blue sky.

When first seen his flight was nearly in a straight line, slanting up in the direction of the kite—for that was the object that had started him. He was evidently bent upon robbing the latter of his late-gotten booty.

The kite had heard the cry that echoed his own; and, knowing its import, at once plied all the power of his wings to rise higher into the air. He seemed resolved to hold on to his hard-earned plunder; or, at all events, not to yield it, without giving the more powerful robber the trouble of a chase. The fresh remembrance of the peril he had passed through in obtaining it, no doubt stimulated him to this resolve.

Birds of his species will sometimes outfly and escape the eagle—that is, some eagles, for these bird-kings differ in degrees of swiftness as hounds or horses. So, too, do the kites; and the one in question having, no doubt, full confidence in his wings, thought he would make trial of those of his pursuer—who, being personally unknown to him, might be some individual too fat, or too old, or too young, perhaps, to possess full powers of flight. At all events he had made up his mind to have a "fly" for it—believing that if overtaken he could easily put an end to the pursuit by surrendering the snake, as his cousin, the osprey, often has to do with his fish. Up, therefore, he went, in a spiral curve of about fifty yards in diameter.

If the kite entertained the idea that his pursuer was either a very old or young bird, or too fat a bird, or in any way a "slow" bird, he was likely to be soon undeceived. That idea was not shared by those who watched him in his flight. On the contrary, the young hunters thought they had never seen a more splendid specimen of his

kind,—of full feather, snow-white head and tail-tip, and broad clean-cut wings. He was one of the largest size, too; which proved him not to be a “him,” but a female—for, strange to say, Nature seems to have reversed her order with these birds—the females being universally brighter in plumage, larger in body, swifter of wing, stronger, and even fiercer than the males. It may be inferred, that in the social life of “eagle-dom” the fair sex have their “rights,” and perhaps a little more. One thing is certain, and it seems to be a consequence of this (in compliment to the sex I say it) that nothing like polygamy is known amongst them. Woe to the eagle husband that would even dream of such a thing!

Voilà! up goes the kite, straining every pinion of his pointed wings—up the spiral curve, screwing himself towards the zenith. Upward follows the eagle, spirally as well, but in wider gyrations that embrace and seem to hold the curvatures of the other within their circumference. Both birds circle concentrically. Now their orbits cross each other—now they are wheeling in parallel curves. Still upward flies the kite—still upward goes the pursuing eagle. Closer and closer they appear to come; narrower grow their soaring circles—but that is because they are more distant and seem so. See! the kite is but a speck, and appears stationary—now he is lost to the view. See! the eagle is but a speck! She, too, disappears! No, not altogether—the little spot like the fragment of a white cloud, or a piece of snow upon the sky—that is her tail-tip. Ha! it is gone too—they are beyond the reach of our vision.

Hark! Ish–sh–ish! Did you hear that sound, like the whistling of a rocket? See! Something has fallen upon the tree-top, breaking several branches! As I live it is the kite! Dead he is, and the blood is spurting from a wound in his shoulder!

Hark, again! Whush–sh–ush! It is the eagle. See! she has the serpent in her talons!

The eagle had shot down from her elevation, though no eye could have followed her in that arrow-like descent. When within two or three hundred yards of the ground, her wings flew out, her tail was spread, and, suddenly lowered, fan-like to its fullest

extent, arrested her downward course; and, with a few measured strokes, she glided slowly over the tops of the trees, and alighted on the summit of the dead magnolia.

Basil seized his rifle, with the intention of having a shot. There was not much cover on the ground that encircled the tree where the eagle had perched herself; and the young hunter knew from experience that his only chance of getting near enough was to make his approach upon horseback. He therefore drew the picket that fastened Black Hawk; and, flinging himself upon the horse's back, rode off among the bushes. He had been gone but a few minutes when a sharp crack was heard, and the eagle was seen tumbling from her perch.

This was the last link in the chain of destruction!

Chapter Twelve.

The White-Headed Eagle.

Basil returned, bringing with him the great bird. It was a female—as Lucien knew—and one of the largest, being over twelve pounds in weight, and measuring seven feet between the tips of the wings when expanded. The bird of this species rarely exceeds eight pounds in weight, and is proportionately small in other respects.

The white-headed eagle (Falco leucocephalus), or "bald eagle," as he is generally called because his white head gives him somewhat of a bald appearance—has been adopted by the United States as the emblem of their Republic. If his disposition be considered, he would be a more fit emblem for a band of robbers—for a more absolute robber and tyrant does not exist among the feathered races. He robs the osprey of his fish, and the vulture of his carrion; in short, lords it over every creature weaker than himself. Now this is not the character of the nation he represents—far from it. It is true they have shown a desire to extend their territory, and have made conquests to this end. But what is the motive of these conquests? Is it to enslave and render tribute? No. They conquer not to enslave, but to make free! There are two

motives for Anglo-American—I may say Anglo-Saxon, conquest, for true Englishmen feel these motives as much as Americans do. They wish to bring the whole world under a liberal form of government—one that will bear the scrutiny of reason—one that in time may extinguish crime, and render poverty a thing of the past—one that is not a patent usurpation and a robbery—a robbery perhaps more criminal in the eyes of God than waylaying on the highroad, or piracy on the high seas—more criminal, because more extensive in its fatal effects. Anglo-Saxons wish to destroy despotism, lest they or their descendants might again become what their ancestors once were—its victims. This, then, is one motive of their conquests, and it is nothing more than the naked instinct of self-preservation. But there is another motive—a nobler and more generous one. They have drunk from the cup of Liberty—the draught has pleased them, has given them happiness and joy; and, urged by that better part of our nature, they wish to share that sweet cup—ample for all—with all men. This is the true motive of the conquest of civilisation; and under the banner of such a cause, it is a question whether war and anarchy and confusion be not preferable to the deceptive peace and apparent prosperity of despotism, that, like the death-dealing vampire, soothes while it destroys.

I do not say that all Americans nor all Englishmen are entitled to the glory of such a holy motive for conquest. No. Too large a proportion, alas! are actuated only by the ignoble idea of selfish or national aggrandisement. The robber is often found in the same camp, and fighting under the same banner, with the soldier of Freedom. It is not strange, therefore, that the true sons of Liberty should sometimes be associated with its bastard children of the shackle and the whip.

But, I shall not weary you with any more political science. Not that I consider it of small importance to you. On the contrary, I deem that science the most important of all others that have ever occupied the attention of men. Its influence extends to almost every object around you. It shapes the carriage in which you ride, and the ship in which you sail. Its knowledge modifies the nature of your soul, and decides

whether you shall be a slave or a freeman. It even extends to the form of your body, giving it the abject attitude and gloomy aspect of slavery and guilt, or the bold, upright carriage and joyous look of virtue, which God gave to the first man when He made him after His own image.

But come, boy reader! I have promised not to weary you with these things. Such teachings I must reserve for a future opportunity; when, God willing, I shall present them to intellects older than yours. Perhaps you yourselves may then be old enough to take an interest in them; and if so, you may learn some truths that for long years have been the study of your friend—the author.

Now let us return to the eagle. I am thinking what a pity it is that the Americans should have chosen this tyrant-bird as the emblem of their liberty; for, although he is most appropriate for one portion of their people, he is far from being a fit emblem of the principles of the great republic. So thought the wise Franklin. There are many other animals, peculiar to the territory of the United States, far more deserving of the distinction. There is the bold but harmless buffalo, the stately elk, and the industrious beaver; or if a bird must needs be upon the banner, where could one be found better suited to that end than the wild-turkey, possessing as he does a combination of good qualities—grace, beauty, courage, and usefulness? Thus reasoned Franklin; and it might be yet worth the while of the American people to give consideration to his reasoning, and discard the eagle; or, at all events, change the species—for peculiar to the United States territory there is another bird of the kind, far nobler, as well as larger and more beautiful.

It is curious to observe how many countries have adopted this rapacious bird for their emblem; and it forms a sad index to the motives that have hitherto actuated nations. In ancient times it was seen upon the banners of Persia and Rome. In modern days Napoleon spread its wings like black shadows over France. It is the emblem of Russian despotism and American freedom. Austria, Prussia, Poland,

Sicily, Spain, Sardinia, and many of the small governments of Germany, look up to the eagle on their standards; while, upon the other side of the Atlantic, it waves over the great nations of the United States and Mexico, as well as several of the smaller republics. Why, a general war among the nations of the world would be almost exclusively a war among the eagles! It is not improbable that the lion would insist upon having a claw in the quarrel; although his honesty and nobility of disposition are very much doubted, particularly by the jackal and some other animals. He is, therefore, no better qualified to act as the representative of a pacific people than the very worst of the eagles; but he fortunately has a wise keeper, called Public Opinion, who of late has held him under some restraint.

“What a chain of destruction!” exclaimed Lucien. “One creature preying upon another.”

“Ay,” added François; “and how curious it should begin with a bird and end with a bird. Look at the two together. Ha! ha!”

As François made this remark, he pointed to the little humming-bird and the great eagle—which had been laid side by side upon the grass, and, sure enough, presented in size and appearance a most singular contrast to each other.

“You forget, François,” said Lucien, “there were two other links to the chain, and perhaps many more.”

“What other links?” demanded François.

“The humming-bird, you remember, when attacked, was himself a destroyer. He was killing the little blue-winged fly.”

“That is certainly another link, but—”

“Who killed the eagle?”

“Ah, true! Basil, then, was the last link in the chain of destruction.”

“Perhaps the most criminal, too,” said Lucien, “because the least necessary. The

other creatures were but following out their instincts to procure food, whereas Basil's only motive was one of wanton destruction."

"I beg to differ with you, Luce," said Basil, interrupting his brother, sharply, "it was no such thing. I shot that eagle because he killed the kite, and robbed him of his prey, instead of using his industry and getting food for himself. That's why I added a link to your chain."

"In that sense," replied Lucien, smiling at his brother—who seemed a little ruffled at being thus charged with unnecessary cruelty,—"in that sense you were, perhaps, justifiable; though it is difficult to understand why the eagle was more guilty than the kite himself. He took only one life, and so did the kite."

"But," rejoined Basil, "in addition to taking away the life of his victim, he robbed him. Robbery and murder both. Now the kite was guilty only of the latter."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Lucien and François together. "There is a distinction with a difference!"

"But, brother Luce," inquired François, "what did you mean when you said there might be many more links to this chain?"

"Why, who knows but the blue-winged fly was preying upon some other creatures smaller than himself? And these again, upon others still less; who, though invisible to our eyes, possess life and organisation as well as we. Who knows to the contrary? And who knows the reason why a mysterious Providence has created those beings to be the food of each other? That is a question about which we can arrive at no satisfactory conclusion."

"Who knows, brother," said François, "since you are speculating—who knows but there may be an extra link at the other end of the chain? Ho, Basil! what say you? Suppose we fall in with grizzly bears." And François laughed as he put the question.

"And supposing we do," replied Basil, "you are as likely to form that link as anybody else."

“Heaven forbid!” exclaimed Lucien. “I hope that in all our travels we shall see neither a grizzly bear nor an Indian.”

“And I hope for nothing of the sort,” rejoined Basil. “I long to have a crack at a grizzly; and as for Indians, I haven’t the least fear of them, so long as I carry this.”

As Basil made this remark, he drew out the little beaded case from his bosom, held it up a moment, and then returned it to its place again.

“Now, brother,” cried François, “tell as about that pouch, and how it is to save us from Indians. I am really curious to know.”

“Not now, my boy,” replied Basil, with a patronising air. “Not now. We must prepare our supper, and get to sleep. We have lost half a day drying our rags, so we must make up for it by an early start in the morning. Then for the prairies!”

“Then for the prairies!” echoed François,—“the prairies—the wild horses—the big-horns—and the buffalo!”

Chapter Thirteen.

Three Buffaloes with Wings.

Our travellers next morning resumed their journey, and for several days continued on without meeting any incident worth recording. They crossed many large streams, among which may be mentioned the Neches and Trinity of Texas.

On the “divide,” between the Trinity and Brazos rivers, an adventure befell them that came near having a painful result.

In hot weather it was their custom to halt during the noon hours, both to refresh themselves and rest their animals. This is the custom of most travellers through these wild regions, and is called “nooning.”

With this intention, one day, they drew bridle by the edge of a tract of prairie, and dismounted. Behind them was the forest through which they had just passed, and before them lay the prairie, which they intended to cross in the cool of the evening.

The surface of the latter was quite level, covered with a green mantle of young buffalo-grass, with here and there an island of low timber that broke the monotony of the view. In the distance a thick forest of live oak bounded the prairie on the other side; and although the latter appeared only two or three miles distant, it was not less than ten—so deceptive is the pure atmosphere of these upland regions. The country in which they now were was what is termed “timber prairie”—that is, a prairie interspersed with groves and copses.

I say our adventurers had just dismounted, and were about to take off their saddles, when an exclamation from François drew the attention of his brothers.

“Voilà!” cried he, pointing out to the open ground. “Buffaloes—buffaloes!”

Basil and Lucien looked in the direction pointed out. Three large dark objects were seen on the crest of a low swell in the prairie. They were moving about; and one was evidently smaller than the others.

“Of course they are buffaloes,” continued François. “Look at their size! Two bulls and a cow, no doubt.”

His brothers agreed with him. None of the three had ever seen buffaloes in their native wilderness; and of course had but an indistinct idea of how they might appear from a distance. Buffaloes they must be—elk or deer would look red—wolves red or white; and they could not be bears, as these last would not likely be out on the prairie in threes, unless, indeed, they might be grizzly bears—who do sometimes go out into the open ground to dig for the “pomme-blanche” and other roots. This, however, was not probable, as the grizzly bears are seldom or never found so far to the eastward. No. They were not “grizzlys.” They were not wild horses neither, that was plain enough. Buffaloes, then, they must be.

Like all who see buffaloes for the first time in their native pastures, our young hunters were filled with excitement—the more so, since to meet with these animals was the object of their expedition, of the long and perilous journey they had

undertaken.

A hurried consultation followed as to how they should capture these three. It was true that none of them was a white buffalo; but no matter. Our hunters wanted to taste buffalo-beef; and the chase after these would give them practice, which might serve them afterwards. How, then, were they to set about it?

“Why, run them, of course,” counselled the ready François, with the air of an experienced buffalo-hunter.

Now, there are several methods of hunting buffaloes, practised upon the prairies, both by whites and Indians. The most common is that of which François spoke, “running.” This is done by simply overtaking the buffalo, galloping alongside of him—the hunter, of course, being on horseback—and shooting him through the heart while he runs. Shoot him in the region of the heart you must; for you may put twenty bullets into his great body elsewhere, and he will still manage to get away from you. The hunters aim a little above the brisket, and behind the fore-shoulder. The white hunters use the rifle, or sometimes a large pistol—which is better for the purpose, as they can load it more easily while going in a gallop. The Indians prefer the bow—as they can shoot arrow after arrow in quick succession, thus slaying many buffaloes in a single “run.” So expert are they with this weapon, that their arrows have been known to pierce through the bodies of large buffaloes, and pass clear out on the other side! At times the Indians use spears with which they thrust the buffaloes, while galloping alongside of them.

Another method of hunting these animals, is termed “approaching.”

“Approaching” buffaloes is nothing else than creeping stealthily on them until within range, when the hunter fires, often loads again and fires, and so on, until many of them are killed, before their companions take the alarm and scamper off. Indeed, the hunter will sometimes crawl up to a herd; and concealing himself behind the bodies of those he has already killed, fire away until many have fallen. In doing

this he takes care to keep to leeward; for if otherwise, and these animals—who have much keener scent than sight—should happen to “wind” him, as it is termed, they are off in a moment. So keen is their scent, that they can detect an enemy to windward at the distance of a mile or more. In “approaching,” the hunter sometimes disguises himself in the skin of a wolf or deer; when the buffaloes, mistaking him for one of these animals, permit him to get within shooting distance. An Indian has been known to creep up in this manner into the midst of a buffalo herd, and with his bow and arrows, silently shoot one after another, until the whole herd lay prostrate! “Approaching” is sometimes a better method than “running.” The hunter thus saves his horse—often a jaded one—and is likely to kill a greater number of buffaloes, and get so many more hides, if that be his object, as it sometimes is. When he is a traveller only, or a beaver-trapper, who wants to get a buffalo for his dinner, and cares for no more than one, then “running” is the more certain mode of obtaining it. In this way, however, he can kill only one, or at most two or three; for, while he is shooting these, and loading between times, the herd scatters, and runs out of his reach; and his horse is apt to be too much “blown” to allow him to overtake them again.

A third method of hunting buffaloes is the “surround.” This is practised only by the Indians—as the white hunters of the prairies are rarely ever in such numbers as would enable them to effect a “surround.” The name almost explains the nature of this hunt, which is practised as follows:—When a hand of Indian hunters discover a herd of buffaloes, they scatter and deploy into a circle around them. They soon accomplish this on their swift horses, for they are mounted—as all prairie-hunters are sure to be, whether whites or Indians. As soon as the circle is formed, the Indians ride inward with loud yells, and drive the buffaloes into a thick clump in the centre. They then dash upon them with bows and lances—each hunter killing as many as he can. The buffaloes become confused, run to and fro, and but few of them in the end get off. A herd of hundreds, and even thousands, is sometimes slaughtered at one of

these battues. The Indians make this wholesale destruction for two objects; first, to get the meat, which they preserve by “jerking”—that is, by cutting into thin strips and drying in the sun—and, secondly, for the skins with which they cover their tents, make their beds, and part of their clothing. Many of them they barter at the trading-houses of the whites—established in remote regions for this purpose—where they receive in exchange knives, rifles, lead, powder, beads, and vermilion.

Another method the Indians have of hunting the buffalo, is not unlike the last, but is still more fearful to witness.

Most of the region where the buffaloes range consists of high upland prairies, such as in Asia are called “steppes,” and in Mexico and South America “mesas,” or “table-lands.” Such plains are elevated from three to six thousand feet above the level of the sea. In many places on these table-lands there are deep rifts called “cañons,” or more properly “barrancas,” that have probably been formed by running water during rain-storms. These are often dry, and look like vast fissures opening down into the earth—often for a thousand feet or more—and extending away for scores of miles across the prairie. Sometimes two of them intersect each other, forming a triangular space or peninsula between; and the traveller on reaching this point is obliged to turn back, as he finds himself almost encircled by precipices yawning downward into the earth. Whenever the Indians get a herd of buffaloes near one of these cañons, they surround them on three sides, and guide them towards the precipice; and when they are near enough, gallop forward with wild shouts, causing the buffaloes to dash madly and blindly over. A whole herd will sometimes leap a precipice in this way—those in the front being forced over by the others, and, these in turn pressed, either to take the leap or be thrust by the spears of the pursuing horsemen. Sometimes when the Indians are not insufficient numbers to make a “surround” of buffalo, they collect buffalo chips, and build them in little piles so as to represent men. These piles are placed in two rows, gradually converging towards each other, and leading to one of the aforementioned bluffs. Between these two rows

they drive the buffaloes, that, mistaking the piles of their own “chips” for Indians, are guided onwards to the edge of the precipice, when the hunters make their noisy rush, and force them over.

There are other methods of buffalo-hunting, such as pursuing them in the snow, when the hunters in their snow-shoes easily overtake and slaughter them. Some Mexican buffalo-hunters (in the southern prairies called “ciboleros”) capture the buffalo with the lasso; but this method is not often practised, except when they wish to catch the young calves alive for the purpose of raising them.

Now, all these methods were familiar to our three young hunters—that is, familiar from descriptions—as they had often heard about them from old trappers who came down among the settlements of Louisiana, and who sometimes spent the night under their father’s roof—for the Colonel liked very much to entertain these old trappers, and get a talk out of them. It was from this source then, that François derived his ideas of buffalo-hunting, which led him in the pride of his knowledge to exclaim, “Run them, of course.”

Basil and Lucien took a little time to consider it, all the while keeping their eyes fixed upon the three buffaloes. There was just one a-piece, which they could separate, and run down—they were far from any cover, and it might therefore be difficult to “approach” them—moreover the horses were fresh, for the day before had been Sunday, and our adventurers had always made it a rule to lie by on that day, to rest both themselves and their animals. This they did in accordance with a command given to them by their father at starting. All things considered, then, “running” was the best plan, and it was the one they resolved to adopt.

Jeanette was tied to a tree, and left behind with her packs, that had not yet been taken off. Marengo, of course, was taken along with them, as he might prove useful in pulling down one of the old bulls if wounded. Everything that might encumber the hunters was left with Jeanette; and all three rode out upon the prairie, and made

direct for the animals. It was agreed that each should choose one of them, and then do his best with gun and pistols. François had put buck-shot into both barrels, and was full of confidence that he was about to “throw” his first buffalo.

As they drew nearer, a lustrous appearance upon the bodies of the strange animals attracted their attention. Were they buffaloes, after all?

The brothers rode quietly onward, observing them with attention. No, buffaloes they were not. The rough shaggy bodies of these would not shine so, for they glittered in the sun as they moved about. Buffaloes they could not be.

“That they are not,” said Lucien, after a deliberate look through his fingers.

“What are they then?” inquired François.

“Listen!” replied Lucien; “do you hear that?”

All three had drawn bridle. A loud “gobble—obble—obble,” proceeded from the animals, evidently uttered by some one of the three.

“As I live,” exclaimed François, “that’s the gobble of an old turkey-cock!”

“Neither more nor less,” replied Lucien, with a smile. “They are turkeys!”

“Turkeys!” echoed Basil, “turkeys taken for buffaloes! What a grand deception!”

And all three at first looked very blank at each other, and then commenced laughing heartily at the mistake they had made.

“We must never tell of this,” said Basil, “we should be laughed at, I reckon.”

“Not a bit of it,” rejoined Lucien, “such mistakes are often made, even by old travellers on the prairies. It is an atmospheric illusion very common. I have heard of a worse case than ours—of a raven having been taken for a buffalo!”

“When we meet the buffaloes then, I suppose we shall mistake them for mammoths,” remarked François; and the disappointed hunters now turned their attention to the capturing of birds instead of buffaloes.

Chapter Fourteen.

A Wild-Turkey Hunt.

“Come on!” cried Basil, putting the spur to his horse, and riding forward. “Come on! It isn’t so bad a case after all—a good fat turkey for dinner, eh? Come on!”

“Stay, brother,” said Lucien, “how are we to get near them? They are out on the open ground—there is no cover.”

“We don’t want cover. We can ‘run’ them as we were about to do had they been buffaloes.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed François; “run a turkey! Why it will fly off at once. What nonsense you talk, brother!”

“I tell you, no,” replied Basil. “It is not nonsense—it can be done—I have often heard so from the trappers,—now let us try it ourselves.”

“Agreed, then,” said François and Lucien at once; and all three rode forward together.

When they had got near enough to distinguish the forms of the birds, they saw they were two old “gobblers” and a hen. The gobblers were strutting about with their tails spread like fans, and their wings trailing along the grass. Every now and then they uttered their loud “gobble—obble—obble,” and by their attitude and actions it was evidently an affair of rivalry likely to end in a battle. The female stalked over the grass, in a quiet but coquettish way—no doubt fully aware of the warm interest she was exciting in the breasts of the belligerent gobblers. She was much smaller than either of these, and far less brilliant in plumage. The males appeared very bright indeed—almost equal to a pair of peacocks—and as their glossy backs glanced in the sun with metallic lustre, our hunters thought they had never before seen such beautiful birds.

Taken up with their own quarrel, they would no doubt have allowed the hunters to

get within shooting distance of them. The female, however, was upon the alert; and seeing these draw near, she raised her head with a loud “tweet!” which attracted the attention of her companions. In a moment their spread tails closed and came to the ground, their wings were shut up, and their long necks stretched into the air. Their forms underwent a complete change, and they now stood erect upon the prairie, Each of them full five feet in height!

“Beautiful creatures!” exclaimed Lucien.

“Yes,” muttered Basil. “They will not give us much longer time though. We had best make a dash. Take you the hen, Luce, your horse is the slowest. Now for it. For-ward!”

All three spurred their horses, and dashed forward together, Marengo leading the chase. In a moment they were within a hundred yards or so of the turkeys. The latter, thus suddenly set upon, ran a few paces, and then rose into the air, with a loud flapping of their wings. They took different directions, confused by being sprung in such haste. Each of the boys had selected the one he intended pursuing; and upon that one alone his eyes became fixed. Basil and François followed the gobblers, while Lucien rode at a quiet gallop after the hen.

Marengo, of course, took part in the chase, joining in with Lucien—whether because he deemed the hen to be “sweeter meat,” or that she was likely to be the easiest caught of the three.

She did not fly far before coming to the ground again; when she ran with all her might for the nearest clump of timber. Hither Lucien followed, Marengo leading the way, and occasionally uttering a sonorous yelp as he ran. As Lucien entered the timber, he saw the dog standing by the root of a large oak. He had “treed” the turkey, and was looking upward with glancing eyes, barking and wagging his tail. Lucien rode cautiously under the tree, where he perceived the turkey crouching among the moss, upon one of its highest branches. His rifle was up to his shoulder in

a moment; and after the crack, the bird was heard tumbling and fluttering through the leaves. Marengo sprang upon it as it came to the ground; but his master, leaping from his horse, scolded him off, and took up the game which was found to be quite dead.

Lucien now remounted: and, as he rode out into the open ground, he could see Basil far off upon the prairies. He was going at full gallop; and the gobbler with outspread wings was seen some distance ahead of him, running like an ostrich! Both Basil and gobbler soon disappeared to his view—lost behind one of the timber islets. Lucien looked for François. The latter was nowhere to be seen—having pursued his gobbler in a direction where the groves were more thickly studded over the prairie. Thinking it would be of no use to follow either of them, Lucien rode slowly back to where Jeanette had been left upon the edge of the forest. Here he dismounted, and sat down to await the return of his brothers.

Basil's chase proved a longer one than he had expected. He had chosen the biggest of the birds; and, no doubt, the strongest and toughest. His gobbler, at the first flight, made a clear stretch of nearly a mile; and, when he alighted again, ran like a scared cat. But Basil was not to be discouraged; and, keeping the spurs well to his horse, soon gained upon him. The turkey again took to his wings, dropping down another half mile in the advance. Again Basil galloped up; and once more the old cock rose into the air—this time flying only about a hundred yards before he alighted. Basil was soon up to him with his fleet horse; but the gobbler was now unable to fly any farther. He could run, however, at a good rate; and where there was an uphill in the prairie he ran faster than the horse. Downhill, the latter gained upon him; and thus they went, until the bird began to double and circle about, showing all the symptoms of weariness. Several times the horse ran over him, the turkey on these occasions turning and taking the back-track.

A Wild-Turkey Hunt

The chase was prolonged for a considerable time. The bird, at length, became completely exhausted; and squatting down, thrust his head and long neck among the weeds, like the ostrich, thinking himself thus hidden from his pursuer. Basil now drew his horse's rein, raised his long rifle, and the next moment a bullet passed through the gobbler, and stretched him dead upon the grass.

Basil then dismounted; and, taking up the turkey, tied its legs to the cantle of his saddle. This required all Basil's strength, for the bird was one of the largest size—a forty-pounder.

As soon as the hunter had made all fast, he leaped back into his saddle, and commenced riding—Where? Ay, that was the question which he asked himself before his horse had advanced three lengths of his body—where was he going? All at once the thought came into his mind that he was lost! Groves of timber were on all sides of him. They were like each other; or, if they differed, he had not in his wild gallop noted that difference, and it could not serve to direct him now. He had not the slightest idea of the point whence he had come, and therefore knew not in what direction to go. He saw and felt that he was lost!

My young reader, you cannot conceive the thoughts that come over one who is lost upon the prairies. Such a situation has appalled the stoutest hearts ere now. Strong men have trembled at feeling themselves thus alone in the wilderness; and well might they, for they knew that the consequence has often been death. The shipwrecked mariner in his open boat is scarcely worse off than the lost traveller upon the prairie-sea; and many, under the circumstances, have gone mad! Fancy then the feelings of the boy Basil.

I have already said, he was a cool and courageous lad. He was so, and proved it now. He did not lose presence of mind. He reined in his horse, and surveyed the prairie around him with an intelligent eye. It was all to no purpose. He saw nothing that would give him a clue to the spot where he had separated from his brothers. He

shouted aloud, but there was neither echo nor answer. He fired off his rifle, and listened—thinking Lucien or François might reply by a similar signal; but no such signal gratified his ear. He reloaded, and sat for a while in his saddle, buried in thought.

“Ha! I have it!” he exclaimed, suddenly raising himself in his stirrups, “Why was I so stupid? Come, Black Hawk! we are not lost yet!”

Basil had not been all his life a hunter for nothing; and although he had but little experience upon the prairies, his wood craft now stood him in stead. The thought which had so suddenly occurred to him was a good one, the only one that could with certainty save him. He had resolved to return upon his own tracks.

He wheeled his horse; and, with eyes bent upon the ground, rode slowly along. The turf was firm, and the hoof-marks were not deep; but Basil had a hunter’s eye, and could follow the track of a fawn. In a few minutes he arrived on the spot where he had killed the turkey. The blood and feathers upon the grass made him sure of this. Here he halted a moment, until he could determine the direction in which he had approached this spot. That was at length resolved to his satisfaction; and he rode slowly in the back-track. After a few lengths of his horse had been passed over, the trail doubled. Basil followed the double, and came back, passing almost over the same ground again. Again it doubled as before, and again and again, without going a hundred yards from the place where the bird had been shot. All these turnings the young hunter retraced with the greatest care and patience. In this he showed his judgment and his knowledge of hunter-craft; for, had he grown impatient and taken a wider range to find the trail, he might have fallen upon his last-made tracks, and thus have brought himself into a regular maze.

After a while the circles in which he travelled became larger; and, to his great joy, he at length found himself advancing in a straight line. Many horse-tracks crossed his trail; some of them nearly as fresh as his own. These did not baffle him. They

were the tracks of mustangs; and although Black Hawk was not shod any more than they, his rider knew the print of the latter's hoof as well as he knew the appearance of his own rifle. The Arab's track was considerably larger than those of the wild horses.

After following the trail backward for nearly an hour,—his eyes all the time bent upon the ground,—he was suddenly startled by a voice calling him by name. He looked up, and beheld Lucien by the edge of the woods. With a shout of joy he plied the spur and rode forward. As he drew near, however, his feeling of joy became one of painful apprehension. There was Lucien,—there were Jeanette and Marengo,—but where was François?

"Where is François?" inquired Lucien, as Basil rode up.

The latter could hardly speak, so strong were his emotions.

"O brother!" he faltered out at length, "has François not returned?"

"No," answered Lucien, "I was thinking he was with you, and you would come back together. I have been wondering what could have detained you so long."

"O God, he is lost!" cried Basil, breaking into an agony of grief. "Lucien! Lucien! our brother is lost!"

"Lost! what mean you?" asked Lucien, half believing that François had been attacked by Indians, or some wild animal, and that that was what Basil meant. "Has anything happened to him? Speak, Basil!"

"No, no!" replied Basil, still speaking wildly, "lost on the prairie! O brother, you know not what it is—it is a fearful thing. I have been lost,—I have got back; but François, poor little François! there is no hope for him! he is lost—lost!"

"But have you not seen him since we all three parted?" inquired Lucien in dismay.

"No, not since we parted. I was myself lost, and have been all this time finding my way. I succeeded by following back my own trail, else we might never have met

again. O François! poor brother François! what will become of him?”

Lucien now shared the apprehensions as well as the agony of his brother. Up to this time he had been under the impression that they had got together, and something had detained them—perhaps the breaking of a stirrup-leather or a girth, he knew not what—and he was just beginning to grow uneasy when Basil made his appearance. He knew not what it was to be lost; but Basil’s wild explanations enabled him to conceive what it might be; and he could well appreciate the situation of François. It was no time, however, to indulge in paroxysms of grief. He saw that Basil was half unmanned; the more so because the latter looked upon himself as the cause of the misfortune. It was Basil who had counselled the running of the turkeys and led on to the chase.

Instead of giving way to despair, however, both felt that they must take some steps for the recovery of their lost brother.

“What is to be done?” said Lucien.

Basil now became himself again. The hope of saving François restored him to his wonted energy and courage.

“Is it better we should remain here?” asked Lucien, who knew that his brother’s strong judgment would decide upon the best plan.

“No,” replied the latter; “it is of no use. I could not have found my way back, but for the tracks of my horse. François will not think of that; and even if he did, his horse is a mustang, and the prairie is covered with mustang tracks, running in every direction. No, no, he will never come back here, except by chance; and there are a thousand chances to one against it. No, we must go in search of him; we must go upon his trail; and that I fear will be impossible among so many others. Before we leave this place,” continued Basil, “let us try every chance that is left. Are you loaded?”

“Yes,” replied Lucien.

“Fire, then, a moment or two after I do. The first report may call his attention to the second.”

Basil raised his piece and fired into the air. A few seconds after, Lucien fired also, and both stood to listen, their hearts beating audibly.

For five minutes or more they stood—so that François might have time to load his gun, if empty. There was no response.

Again the brothers loaded their rifles—with powder only—putting in heavy charges and ramming home tightly, in order that the explosions might be the louder. Again they fired as before. The result was the same; there was no answer to their signal.

“It proves that he is very distant,” said Lucien, “for sounds can be heard a great way off in this region.”

“Let us try a smoke,” said Basil, putting away his rifle. “Gather some wood, Luce, while I kindle the leaves.”

Basil picked up some pieces of the burning wad; and having taken it out to the open ground, raked together a pile of dry leaves and grass, and ignited it. Meanwhile Lucien collected an armful of sticks, and placed them upon the pile. Others were then thrown on top, with green leaves and boughs broken from the trees, and, over all, several armfuls of Spanish moss which hung plentifully from the oaks. A thick blue smoke soon ascended high into the heavens; and the brothers stood with searching eyes that scrutinised the prairie in all directions.

“He must be far off if he cannot see that,” remarked Lucien. “It should be visible for ten miles around, I should think!”

“At least that much,” answered Basil; “but he would not be long in getting ten miles away. The chase might have carried him a good part; and, finding himself lost, he would soon gallop the rest.”

“Unless,” suggested Lucien, “he may have ridden about, as you did, upon his own

trail."

"No, he would not be likely. Poor little François would not think of it; he has not enough craft for that; and, indeed, I almost hope that he has not done so."

"Why do you hope so?" inquired Lucien.

"Because we will stand a better chance of making out his trail if he has gone straight forward."

"True, true," rejoined Lucien, and both again were silent, and stood watching the prairie openings with anxious eyes.

They remained for a considerable time, but at length turned to each other with countenances that exhibited a disappointed and sad expression.

"He is not coming," said Lucien, in a sorrowful tone.

"No; he would have been up long since. He would be certain to gallop if he had seen the smoke. We must go after him."

They turned towards their horses. Basil's glance fell upon the dog. A gleam of joy shot into his eye, and big whole bearing became suddenly changed.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "we have been wasting time. Quick, Lucien!—your horse! to your horse!"

"What is it?" asked Lucien in surprise.

"Do not ask me—a good thought strikes me; but we have not a moment to lose—time is precious. Let us be off!"

"But shall we leave Jeanette?"

"By all means. François might come up."

"If he should, how is he to know where we are gone?"

"True," answered Basil, reflecting a moment. "Oh!" he continued, "give me your paper and pencil. You tie Jeanette while I write."

Lucien handed him a small slip of paper with a pencil; and then proceeded to tie the mule securely to one of the branches.

Basil took the paper and wrote:—

“François, we are gone upon your trail. Stay by Jeanette.”

He fastened the paper conspicuously to the trunk of a tree; and then, seizing his rifle and leaping into the saddle, called upon Lucien to follow him.

Lucien mounted, and rode after, while the dog Marengo trotted in the rear.

Chapter Fifteen.

Trailing with a Blood-Hound.

They rode in a direct line to the spot where they had started in pursuit of the turkeys. From this place François had taken to the left; but there were many tracks leading in the same direction—of horses, too, that had galloped.

“As I told you, brother,” remarked Basil, “we could never have followed his trail by the tracks. Even here we are not certain of it. These must be his though—they look a little fresher than the others. Let us try them. Marengo!”

“Stay, brother!” interrupted Lucien. “The last place I saw François was yonder. I caught a glimpse of him passing round that point of timber.”

“Ha! that is better. Perhaps, there his tracks may be separate from the others. Come on!”

They rode about a hundred paces farther, which brought them to the point of timber indicated by Lucien.

“Yes,” exclaimed Basil, “you are right! He has passed here. There are his tracks distinctly.”

Basil dismounted, giving Lucien his rein. He knelt upon the grass, and examined the hoof-prints, one after the other, with extreme care.

“So!” he muttered, as he rose again to his feet, “I shall know you among a thousand.”

“Make yourself ready for a hard ride,” he continued, addressing Lucien. “The dog, no doubt, will lead us in a gallop. Marengo!”

The hound came running up to where the young hunter was stooping over the trail. The latter held a red object in his arms. It was François’ blanket, which he had loosed from his horse’s flank, and flung away when starting on the chase. The dog scented the blanket, uttering as he did so a low whimper, and gazing in his master’s face with a look of intelligence. He seemed to comprehend what was required of him.

Basil now flung the blanket over his own saddle, stooped again, drew his fingers along the grass, and, with a wave of his hand, motioned Marengo to follow its direction. The hound, uttering a single yelp, bent his nose to the ground, and sprang forward upon the trail.

Basil instantly leaped into his saddle; and, snatching up the reins, cried out to his brother,—

“Come, Lucien! we must not lose sight of the dog, though our horses drop dead in their tracks! All depends upon keeping him in view.”

Both plied the spur, and dashed forward at a gallop.

“We must know how to find our way back again,” said Basil, reining up, as they passed the edge of one of the timber clumps. “We must not ourselves get lost;” and, as he said this, he crashed the branch of a tree, until the broken end hung dangling downward. He then resumed his gallop.

For nearly a mile the hound ran in a direct line. It was the first flight of the turkey. His course then altered, although not a great deal, and carried him half a mile or so in a direct line as before.

"The second flight," remarked Basil to his brother, as both followed at a loose gallop, now with their eyes anxiously watching the dog, and now halting a moment by some conspicuous tree to "blaze" their way, by breaking one of its branches.

The dog at length entered a copse.

"Ha!" exclaimed Basil, "François has killed his turkey there. No," he continued—as the hound shot out of the copse again, and struck off into the open plain—"no. It has sought shelter there, but it has been run out again, and gone farther."

Marengo now led in a direct line for several hundred paces; when, all at once, he began to double and run in circling courses over the prairie.

"Draw up, Lucien! draw up!" cried Basil, as he pulled upon his bridle-rein. "I know what that means. Do not ride upon the track—you may baffle him—leave him to himself."

In a few seconds the hound stopped, uttered a short howl, and appeared to toss a dark object upon the grass with his snout. Basil and Lucien had halted at a considerable distance, but they could see that the object was some loose feathers.

"The spot, beyond doubt, where François has killed the turkey," muttered Basil. "If Marengo can only catch the trail by which he rode off all may be well; but—that—that—see! he is off again!"

Now was the time that Basil and Lucien watched with beating hearts. They knew that a crisis was at hand. If Marengo, as Basil said, could find François' departing trail, then he could follow it up almost to a certainty. Of this both the brothers were confident, as they knew the capabilities of the dog. But that was the point to be decided; and both felt for the moment as if the life of their brother hung upon its decision. No wonder, then, that they watched every manoeuvre of the hound with breathless anxiety while they sat, motionless and silent, in their saddles.

The hound after a while ran off from the feathers; and was seen once more to double and circle over the ground. He did not go freely. He was evidently baffled by so

many trails approaching and crossing each other. Again he came back to the spot where the turkey had been killed, and there paused with a howl of disappointment!

Basil and his brother uttered a simultaneous exclamation, that betokened painful feelings. They knew that the howl was a bad sign; but neither spoke.

Once more the dog ran off, and as before turned and wheeled about upon the prairie.

“O God!” exclaimed Basil, in agony, “he is coming on the old track!”

It was too true; for the next moment the hound, running on the back-track, bounded in among the feet of their horses. Here he stopped suddenly, throwing up his head, and uttering another howl of disappointment.

Basil waved him back. He struck out again and followed the old trail, but with like success. He then became confused, and ran every way over the ground, evidently baffled. The brothers regarded each other with looks of dismay. The trail was lost!

“Hold! There is hope yet,” said Basil. “We may find it by making a wider circuit. Take my bridle,” continued he, throwing himself from his horse. “Marengo!—up, Marengo!”

The dog obeyed the call, uttered in accents of command; and came running up to the feet of his master. The latter, telling Lucien to follow with the horses, struck off over the prairie.

He walked slowly, bent forward and downward, carefully observing the ground as he went. He followed the circumference of an irregular circle, of wide diameter—in order to keep outside the doublings which François had made in his last struggle after the wearied bird, and which had thrown the dog out. He passed several horse-trails leading various ways. All these he examined, but none satisfied him. In this manner he had gone half a mile around the circle, when his eye fell upon some that seemed fresher than the rest. He sprang forward, stooping over them with, a shout of joy, as he recognised the hoof-prints of François’ mustang. He knew them by a mark he had taken—where the dog had been first set upon the trail—a small

chip broken from one of the fore hoofs. But Marengo needed not this. He was once more on the right scent; and again started off, nose down, over the prairie.

Basil leaped into his saddle; and, waving his brother to follow, galloped after, riding close upon the heels of the hound.

The trail did not lead in a direct line. At some places it did so for several hundred yards—then it would turn suddenly to the right or left—then turn again and again in zig-zag lines. Sometimes it described the circumference of a circle and at one or two points it recrossed itself. At these places the dog was once or twice nearly baffled again.

They well knew the reason why the trail thus meandered about. Poor François had been wandering, and knew not which way to go.

Once more the trail ran direct for a distance of two miles or more. No doubt François had there kept up his resolution and ridden straight forward; but, as Basil remarked, he had been travelling all the time with his back to their camp! Over this part, as the trail was fresh, the hound ran rapidly, keeping the hunters at a brisk gallop. At the end of the stretch it again turned to the right and westward.

As they faced in this direction, the attention of the brothers was called to the sky. The sun was setting!

A new feeling of apprehension came over them. They knew there was no twilight, or next to none, on these high southern plateaux. Should it come on a dark night, how were they to follow the dog, going as he was upon a run? He might still keep the trail and come up with François, but what would be the good of that, so long as they were not with him? It would only give François another companion in his misery, but no clue by which he would be enabled to find them, or they him.

These thoughts were communicated between the two as they galloped on side by side. Soon the sun set, and the shades of twilight fell upon the grass. It grew darker, until it was difficult to distinguish the dusky body of the hound passing over the

sward. What was to be done? He would soon glide away from them, and leave them without a guide!

“I have it!” suddenly exclaimed Basil; and at the words he spurred his horse forward to overtake Marengo. The next moment he flung himself from the saddle; and, seizing the hound, arrested him in his tracks.

“Alight, brother!” he cried; “alight, and help me. Off with your shirt—it is whiter than mine.”

Lucien, half comprehending his design, immediately pulled off his blouse, and after that his shirt—which was of bleached cotton cloth lightly striped, and in the dim light showed nearly white. Basil took hold of it; and hurriedly tore off the sleeves. He then drew it upon the dog; and having passed the animal’s fore-feet through the arm-holes, tied the collar securely around his throat with a piece of thong, and knotted the skirts over the flanks behind. Thus arrayed, Marengo looked like a street monkey; and was rendered quite visible in the glimmering darkness.

“Now!” cried Basil, exultingly, “we can follow him if it were as dark as pitch.”

“Stay a moment,” said Lucien; “let us make sure. It is clear enough—I can write yet.” As Lucien said this, he took out his note-book, and wrote:—

“François, come back on your own trail. You will find us upon it. If you cannot follow it, let Marengo guide you.”

He tore out the leaf, handing it to Basil, who fastened it securely to the shirt.

Marengo was again set loose, and took to the trail, while both mounted hastily and followed him.

Fortunately the night did not turn out so dark as they had anticipated; and they could see the white covering with sufficient distinctness to enable them to follow it, even at a gallop. And thus they rode for nearly another hour—Basil still blazing their trail as they swept past the timber islets.

All at once, as they rounded a thick grove, a bright object glistened before their eyes. It was a blazing fire under the shadow of some tall trees! Marengo made straight for it. Fearing it might be an encampment of Indians, Basil galloped forward; and, alighting from his horse, intercepted the dog. A halt was made to determine what was best to be done. At that moment the fire blazed up, and a spotted object was seen near it. Hurrah! It was François' mustang! Basil and Lucien now advanced rapidly; and, to their great joy, beheld François sitting by the fire holding something over the blaze. The next moment the brothers were in each other's arms, all three weeping with joy as they embraced!

François soon related his adventures. He had killed his turkey, and then lost himself; but instead of going back upon his own trail, as Basil had done, he had wandered about until night-fall, at intervals shouting and firing his gun. At times his spirit failed him; and he rode for long stretches without touching the bridle, or in any way guiding his horse. Wearied at length, he dismounted, and tied the animal to a tree. It was night when he did so; and feeling cold and hungry, he took courage and kindled a fire. Fortunately the gobbler still hung from the cantle of his saddle; and he had just singed, and was roasting it over the fire, when so agreeably interrupted by the approach of his brothers. At sight of the fine broiling turkey, Basil and Lucien became as hungry as a pair of wolves—for, in consequence of their anxiety, they had not thought of dining. The roast was soon ready; and, after a plentiful supper—which Marengo shared—the young hunters staked their horses upon the grass, wrapped themselves in their blankets, and went to sleep.

Chapter Sixteen.

Jeanette and the Javalies.

Next morning they were astir at an early hour; and, after giving the remains of the gobbler a hurried "devilling," they ate them, and rode off on the back trail. They did not put the dog upon it to guide them—as the scent was now cold, and they feared

that Marengo, keen as he was, might get astray upon it. They trusted to find it from their own tracks, and the "blazes" they had made. It was a slow process, and they were obliged to make frequent halts; but it was a sure one, and they preferred it on that account, as they knew the importance of getting back to Jeanette. The tent, with all their provisions and implements, was in her keeping.

They were in high spirits—as most people are who have just escaped from a perilous adventure—and joked each other as they rode along. Lucien was without a shirt—for Marengo had torn it, and it was now draggled, wet, and worthless. This was a staple joke for François. Jeanette came in for a share of their badinage, as Lucien now remembered that he had tied her head within a foot of the tree, and of course she would be all this time without eating a morsel. Moreover, in their hurry, the pack had been left upon her back; and that was not likely to improve her temper.

It was near mid-day when they came within sight of her.

"Hilloa!" exclaimed François, who first caught a glimpse of her round a point of timber. "What's going on yonder?"

All three halted, and looked across the plain with astonishment depicted in their faces; and no wonder, for a sight it was to astonish anybody. It was Jeanette, to be sure; but Jeanette in most singular attitudes. Her heels were flying in the air—now her fore-feet, now her hind ones—not in single flings, but in constant and rapid kicking. Sometimes the whole set appeared to bounce up at once; and the white canvas of the tent, which had got loosened, was flapping up and down, as her body rose and fell.

The boys looked on for a moment, with feelings of curiosity, not unmingled with fear. "It might be Indians," thought they.

"No," said Basil. "It is wolves—she is attacked by wolves! Let us hasten to her rescue!"

All three spurred their horses into a gallop, and soon got within a few hundred yards.

They could now see the ground by the mule's feet, which was covered, not with wolves, but with animals of a far different species. They were hog-shaped, with small, dark bodies, and long pointed snouts. They had no tails—only knobs in their place; and their tapering snouts opened into a pair of long jaws, with white tusks, that could be seen even in the distance.

"Javalies!" cried Lucien, who, although he had never seen the animal, knew them from description. Javalies they were in fact—the wild-hogs of Mexico.

All three had pulled up, as soon as they saw the animals were not wolves. They did not halt long, for Jeanette was in danger. She was still kicking and squealing like a cat; while the javalies, although several of them lay stretched behind her heels, were uttering their shrill grunts, and rushing at her shanks whenever these rested for a moment upon the earth. There were more than a hundred of them around her feet. The ground was literally covered with their dark forms, crowding each other, and springing nimbly about.

Without waiting to consider the danger, Basil dashed into their midst, followed by François and Lucien. It was well they were mounted, else they never would have come out of that crowd again. All three had fired as they rode up. They believed that this would have scattered the drove; but they found their mistake, for although each of them shot down a victim, it had no effect; and the next moment, their three horses were hopping about, plunging and pitching as badly as Jeanette. The javalies surrounded them with shrill gruntings, driving their tusks into the horses' shanks, and leaping up almost high enough to reach the riders themselves. It was well for them they were good riders. Had any of them been unhorsed at that moment, his fate would have been sealed. They kept their saddles, however, but without being able to reload their pieces. Marengo, who was an old Texas hound, had seen javalies before; and having wisely shied off upon the prairie, stood looking on.

The young hunters soon saw that it was no use keeping their ground, and prepared to

retreat. Basil urged his horse forward to the tree, and with his hunting-knife cut the lasso that fastened Jeanette; then, shouting to his brothers to follow, started in a gallop across the prairie.

Perhaps never was a mule more pleased at getting loose from a fastening than was that she-mule Jeanette; and never did a mule make better use of the heels that had been left her. She galloped over the prairie, as if the very deuce had been after her. But if he was not, the javalies were; for on came the whole drove, scores of them, grunting and screaming as they ran.

The horses easily distanced them. So, too, did Marengo—but there was still danger for Jeanette. She had been now nearly two days without either food or water, and was weak in consequence. Her legs, too, were much torn by the tusks of the wild-hogs. Moreover, the tent that had got loose, trailing on one side to the ground, considerably impeded her flight. This last circumstance in the end proved her salvation; for the javalies, overtaking her, seized the hanging canvas in their jaws, and pulled it from the pack. It fell spreading over the grass like a blanket; and the herd, now coming up and mistaking it for their real enemy, commenced stamping upon it with their hoofs, and tearing it with their teeth. This gave Jeanette time; and she was just the mule at that moment to profit by it. Lightened of her load, she struck out into a fleet gallop, and soon overtook the horses; and the whole cavalcade now kept on, until they had placed several miles between themselves and the javalies. Here they halted with the intention of pitching their camps, as their animals were not only wearied, but Jeanette was hardly able to travel at all. The process of “pitching camp” was now considerably simplified, as they had lost not only their tent, but several of their camp utensils.

What had induced the javalies to attack the mule? This was the subject of conversation with our adventurers, as soon as they had fairly cooled from their race. They knew that these creatures rarely make an assault in such a manner without

provocation. But it was likely Jeanette had given them this. No doubt they had been wandering about in search of food, and lighted upon the turkeys, that Lucien and Basil in their haste had left lying upon the ground. The wild-hogs are not particular as to their food. They will eat fish, flesh, or fowl, snakes, or vegetables; and, finding the brace of birds, had commenced devouring them. In doing so they had come within reach of Jeanette's heels; who, at that moment not being in the best temper had no doubt let fly, and kicked one of them over, and this of course had led to a general onslaught from the whole herd.

It was well for Jeanette that her masters arrived when they did, else her old ribs would soon have cracked under the sharp tusks of the enraged animals.

The javalies, or peccaries—as they are more often termed by naturalists—are in general of a harmless disposition; and, if not interfered with, will rarely make an attack upon man. When provoked, however—by one of their number being wounded, or even when their haunt is invaded—they become both fierce and dangerous. Though small creatures, they possess extreme courage; and their powerful jaws and large tusks render them formidable assailants. Like all animals of the hog species when enraged, they seem to be unconscious of danger; and a herd of them will battle with an enemy until every one has fallen. Not unfrequently the Mexican hunter is "treed" by javalies, and compelled to remain on his perch for hours, and sometimes for days, before his besiegers retire, and leave him to descend with safety.

Chapter Seventeen.

A Cunning Cat and a Sly Old 'Possum.

The place where our adventurers now encamped was in a large grove of white oaks and shell-bark hickory-trees. There was a spring near the centre of the grove, and near this spring the horses were tied, as there grew around it plenty of grass of the mezquite species. The dried meat, which formed the staple of their own provisions,

had been scattered by Jeanette in her flight, and of course lost. What were they to have for dinner? This was an important question; and by way of answer to it, Basil and François took up their guns and walked out to see whether they could fall in with a squirrel or some other eatable creature. But the sun was yet high, and no squirrels could be seen—for these little creatures hide themselves during mid-day, coming out only in the mornings and evenings to feed and play.

Failing to start any game in the thick shady grove, the young hunters bethought them of making trial around its edge; and, after walking a hundred yards or so, they came near the border of the prairie. They did not show themselves suddenly, as they were in hopes they might discover deer, partridges, or some other game in—what is usually a favourite resort—the open ground along the edge of the woods. They stole silently forward, therefore, using the large tree-trunks to screen them.

The prairie was a clear one—that is, without timber-islands, only here and there a tree, and these but small ones, mostly black-jacks and shell-barks. They could see over its surface to a great extent, as it was quite level and covered with short spring buffalo-grass. No deer was upon it. Not an animal of any sort. Yes, there was. On looking more carefully, at no great distance—about two hundred yards out—they beheld two small creatures running over the sward, and at intervals squatting upon their haunches like monkeys, as if conversing with each other.

“Prairie-dogs,” suggested François.

“No,” said Basil, “they are not that, for I see no tails. The prairie-dogs have long tails.”

“What can they be, then?”

“Hares, I take it,” replied Basil, looking through his fingers.

“Hares!” ejaculated François, in some surprise. “Why, they are not bigger than rats! Do you mean that they are young hares?”

“No, indeed, full-grown hares of their species.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed François. “Why, brother, what are your eyes good for? You think they are far off, don’t you? I tell you they are not two hundred yards from us, and a grey squirrel would be a giant beside them. Hares, indeed!”

“I am still of that opinion,” answered Basil, as he continued to gaze intently at the animals. “I am not certain, though. I wish Lucien were here. Perhaps he could tell us what they are.”

“Here he is, then,” said François, as the footstep of Lucien was heard behind them. “Look yonder, Luce!” continued he. “See what Basil calls a pair of full-grown hares!”

“And Basil is right,” replied Lucien, after having examined them for a moment. “They are full-grown hares.”

François looked confounded.

“If I mistake not,” continued Lucien, “they are the species known among the Indians of the prairie as the ‘little chief hare.’ They may be a different variety, though, for there are several species of these small hares found in the Rocky Mountains, and the prairies that lie around them. They are very rare. I wish we could get the skin of one. I am sure papa would prize it highly.”

“That we may soon get,” said François. “Can I not step forward, and shoot one of them?”

“No,” replied Lucien, “they would be off like the wind, before you could get within range.”

“What about Marengo? Can he not catch one?”

“I think not; besides, he would tear it in pieces. No. Our only chance is to remain here. They appear to be making this way.”

The three now took their stations behind the trunks of large trees, so as not to be observed by the timid little animals.

The latter, as they fed and sported over the grass, were still getting nearer to the edge of the grove; but as they advanced in an oblique direction, they were not likely to approach the point where the young hunters were stationed. These thought of moving farther along, so as to meet them; and were about starting to do so, when an object appeared that caused them to remain where they were.

Silently moving among the weeds and brambles, now trotting quickly behind the covering of a prostrate log, now slowly crawling over the more open ground, went a strange animal. At intervals it stopped, squatted low along the earth, and looked eagerly out upon the prairie. It did not see the young hunters. Its yellow eyes were bent upon the innocent little creatures that gambolled over the grass beyond.

It was an odd-looking animal—about the size of a terrier-dog, but, otherwise, altogether unlike one. It was of a reddish yellow colour, with brown spots upon its sides, and stripes or bands of the same along its back. These gave it the appearance of the leopard or tiger species, and it resembled these animals in the rounded, cat-like form of its head. Its erect tufted ears, however, and short tail showed that it differed, in some respects, from the tiger kind. The tail, indeed, was the oddest thing about it. It was not over five inches in length, curving stiffly upward, and looking as if it had been “stumped,” as the tails of terriers usually are. It was not so, however. Five inches was all the tail it ever had; and this shortness of tail, with the thick clumsy legs—but, above all, the high tufted ears, approaching each other at their tips,—enabled the young hunters to tell what it was—a lynx. It was that species known as the “bay lynx” (lynx rufus), commonly called in America the “wild cat,” and sometimes the “catamount.” It was the Texas variety of this animal—which is deeper in colour than the common bay lynx, and, I think, a different species. It was evidently doing its best to get near the little hares, and seize one or both of them. It knew it was not swift enough to run them down, but it might get close enough to spring upon them. It was favoured to some extent by the ground; for, although it was open prairie, the white withered grass of the previous year rose here and there over

the new growth in tufts, large enough to conceal its body as it squatted.

Nearly in a direct line between the lynx and the hares grew a solitary tree, of the pecan species, with spreading limbs; and almost under it was a little patch or thicket of briars, weeds, and high grass—no doubt where some old log, or the carcass of an animal, had mouldered away, and fertilised the soil. For this the lynx was making on one side, and towards it the hares were feeding on the other.

The latter had got very near it, and near, too, to the boys, who could now distinguish their long, erect ears, slender limbs, and graceful motions—resembling, in fact, those of the common hare. Their colour, however, was different. It was a rusty fern, lighter underneath, but in no part—not even under the tail—did any white appear. It was a beautiful sight to behold these innocent little creatures, now nibbling at the blades of grass, now leaping a few feet over the sward, and then settling comically upon their haunches. The young hunters thought it a beautiful sight; and so would you, boy reader, had you witnessed the manoeuvres of these miniature hares.

An odd-looking object now presented itself directly in front of them, and close to the briars. It was of a round shape, and looked like a large clew of hair or wool of a greyish colour, half-buried in the ground. Whether it had been there before, neither Basil, nor Lucien, nor François, could tell. It might have been without their noticing it, as their attention was so occupied with the hares and the lynx. François said he had noticed it a little before; but it had only slightly arrested his attention, as he supposed it to be a tuft of the dry grass or a globe-cactus (echinocactus)—a species of which they had seen much of late, and to which it bore a considerable resemblance. It was evident, however, on closer scrutiny it was not that.

The little hares seemed to notice it about the same time; and, prompted by curiosity, they drew nearer and nearer to it. There was nothing about its appearance to alarm them. They had never been attacked by an enemy in that shape. To all appearance it had neither teeth nor claws, and consequently they had nothing to fear.

Encouraged by the absence of all danger, and vieing with each other in boldness, the little creatures advanced, first one and then the other, a few inches farther, and so on, until their noses almost touched the strange object. All at once the clew-like body flew out, displaying a sharp-snouted four-footed animal, whose long serpent-like tail, at the same instant, sweeping around caught one of the hares in its prehensile embrace! The little creature uttered a shrill squeak, while its companion bounded off in terror.

The opossum (for it was no other than an old she ’possum), now turned upon her tail; and, seizing the head of the hare in her hog-like jaws, killed it at a single “cranch.” She then released it from the coil; and, laying it out upon the grass, would have made a meal of it then and there, had she been permitted to do so. But that was not ordained to be.

The Lynx and Opossum

The lynx, who was crouching forward, not twenty feet from the briars, had been a witness to all this. At first it seemed to give him chagrin. In a little while, however, he appeared rather to like it than otherwise.

“On second thoughts,” said he to himself, “it is better as it is. The ’possum has saved me the trouble of catching the hare, and I might have missed it withal. She has captured the game, but I shall eat it, I guess.”

These thoughts he certainly had—for they were as clearly expressed by his actions, as if he had been gifted with speech and had uttered them aloud. In accordance with them, therefore, he crept on, intending to spring upon the ’possum unawares.

The latter, however, before commencing to eat, like all who know that they have done a guilty deed, raising herself to her full height, looked around to see if any one had been a witness to the act. Her eyes fell upon the lynx; and, hastily seizing the hare in her teeth, she plunged into the bramble.

The lynx, seeing that further concealment was of no use, bounded forward with

curved back and mane erect. He did not at once follow into the briars, but ran around them, in order to discover at what point the ’possum had hid herself. He was not without apprehensions that she might have a hole there. If so, good-bye to both hare and ’possum, thought he.

It appeared not, however; for, after a few circlings around the patch, he was seen to dash boldly in.

For some time nothing could be seen of either lynx or ’possum. The patch covered only a few yards of the prairie, but it was a regular “brake,” with vines, briars, and thistles, thickly interwoven and canopied with leaves. Neither uttered any noise; but the motion of the leaves, and of the brambles at different points, told that a hot pursuit was going on underneath—the pursued no doubt baffling the pursuer, by her body being much smaller and better adapted for squeezing through narrow places.

For some minutes this curious chase was kept up. Then the ’possum glided out into the open ground, to the astonishment of all still carrying the hare in her mouth. She made directly for the tree, and proceeded to climb it, grasping the trunk with her fore-arms, like a human being. Her taking to the tree also excited surprise, as it was a small one—not over thirty feet high—and the young hunters knew that the lynx could climb as well as she.

The latter now came out of the bramble; and with one bound sprang to the foot of the pecan. He did not follow up immediately, but stopped a moment to breathe himself, evidently exulting—as he knew he could easily climb after, and feeling satisfied that he now had his game safe and secure.

“Treed at last, old mother ’possum!” soliloquised he, although not aloud. “I’ll get you now, an’ if I don’t give you a good woppin’ for the trouble you’ve put me to—see if I don’t! I wouldn’t eat ye, nohow—you ain’t sweet enough for that—but I’ll eat that hare, an’ I’ll chastise you for using it so!”

And with this determination he galloped up the pecan, his claws rattling against the

bark.

By this time the opossum had got near the top of the tree, and out upon one of the branches that grew horizontally. Along this the lynx followed; and had arrived almost within reach of the object of his pursuit, when the opossum, suddenly lapping the branch with her tail, let herself down to the limb below! The lynx appeared for a moment as if about to spring after; but the limb was a slender one, and he was not sure that he might be able to grasp it. He, therefore, turned back, evidently chagrined; and, descending by the main trunk, ran out upon the branch now occupied by the opossum. The latter, as before, again let herself down to another limb; and then, without waiting for her pursuer, to another still lower, until she hung on the very lowermost branch of the tree!

The boys thought she was about to drop to the ground, and endeavour to escape to the woods. That, however, was not her intention, for she knew the lynx would soon overtake her if she made the attempt. She had got into the safest situation possible, under the circumstances, and she seemed to know it. She therefore continued to hang on the lowest limb of the pecan—so near its extremity, that the branch bent under her weight. It would not have carried another ’possum—much less the heavier body of a lynx; and the latter, with the “eye of a lynx,” saw that at a glance.

Mortified as he was, however, he was determined to satisfy himself by a trial. He first crawled out upon the limb, proceeding with great caution as far as he dared venture; and then with outstretched claw endeavoured to reach the rings of her tail, thinking he might scratch them off. In this he was not successful. He could barely touch the tail with his toes; and he might just as well have tried to open the claws of an eagle. He next mounted the brands above, thinking this would bring him nearer; but he soon discovered his mistake. Again he ran out upon the limb where the opossum hung, and looked for a moment as if determined to spring down upon her, and carry her along with him to the earth; but the distance deterred him, and after a

while he skulked back and squatted himself in a fork of the tree.

He did not rest long before a new thought, seemed to strike him. The ’possum was not so very high above the ground; perhaps he could spring up and seize her by the nose? It was at all events easy to make the trial. And with this intention he descended to the foot of the tree, and ran out to the spot over which she was hanging. But she was higher than he had calculated; and, like the fox with the grapes, after a few leaps he gave it up. He was resolved, however, to make her stand a siege; and, thinking he would be as comfortable where he was, he did not return to the tree, but sat down upon the grass, keeping his eyes fixed upon his antagonist.

All this while the old ’possum hung quietly upon her tail, holding the hare in her teeth. From the moment she had secured herself in her present position, she seemed to have no fear of her antagonist. On the contrary, her countenance exhibited the expression of a malicious laugh—and this was as evident to the spectators, as words could have made it. The cunning creature plainly enjoyed the chagrin she was causing to the “catamount.”

At intervals, however, the thought seemed to stray across her mind as to how it would all end: and then she assumed a graver look. The lynx, was determined—she saw that in his face—to make her stand a long siege. It would be, therefore, a question of patience and hunger. For the latter she was prepared; and, to enable her to endure it the better, she passed the hare into her hand-like fore-feet, and commenced tearing and eating it!

This was too much for the patience of the lynx. He could bear it no longer, but rose suddenly to his feet; and, with mane erect, rushed up the tree again, and out upon the branch where hung the opossum. This time, without stopping to calculate the danger, he sprang forward, throwing his fore-feet around the other’s hips, and seizing her tail in his teeth. The branch creaked, then broke, and both fell together to the earth!

For a moment the lynx seemed stunned by the fall; but, the next moment, he was "himself again." He raised himself up; arched his back like a true cat; and, with a wild scream, pounced down upon the 'possum. He seemed to have forgotten the hare, which the other had dropped in her fall. Revenge was the passion that now raged strongest within him. Revenge caused him to forget that he was hungry.

The opossum, as soon as she came to the ground, had suddenly clewed herself up; and now presented the same appearance as when she first came upon the stage. Head, neck, limbs, and tail, were no longer visible—nothing but a round ball of thick, woolly hair! At this the catamount tugged with "teeth and toe-nails." He worried it for not less than ten minutes, until he became weary. The 'possum was dead to all appearance; and this the other seemed to think,—or whether he did or not, at all events, he became tired, and left off worrying her. The sweeter morsel—the hare—was before his eyes; and this, perhaps, tempted him to desist, preferring to try his teeth for a while upon it. Leaving the 'possum at length, he turned round and seized upon the hare.

At this moment François let Marengo slip, and the whole party rushed forward with shouts.

The lynx, seeing his retreat cut off from the timber, struck out upon the prairie; but the great hound soon overtook him; and after a short but desperate fight, put an end to his poaching.

The young hunters in the pursuit had picked up the hare, which the lynx had dropped in his flight. When the chase was over they came back to the tree, with the intention of getting the dead 'possum, which they meant to cook for their supper. To their astonishment no 'possum was there—neither in the tree, nor the briar-patch beside it, nor anywhere! The sly creature had been "playing 'possum" throughout all that terrible worrying; and, finding the coast clear, had "unclewed" herself, and stolen off to her hiding-place under the roots of some neighbouring tree!

Nothing remained but the body of the lynx and the poor little carcass of the hare. The former none of our adventurers cared to eat, although it is often eaten both by the trappers and Indians—and the latter was so torn and chawed as to render it worthless. So, since no other game—not even a squirrel—could be found about the place, all four—Lucien, Basil, François, and Marengo, went to sleep—for the first time since the commencement of their journey—supperless!

Chapter Eighteen.

An Odd Adventure before Breakfast.

They had plenty of meat for their breakfast though—such as it was—and came nigh paying dearly enough for it.

The three brothers slept lying along the ground within a few feet of one another. Their tent was gone, and, of course, they were in the open air. They were under a large spreading tree, and, wrapped in their blankets, had been sleeping soundly through the night. Day was just beginning to break, when something touched François on the forehead. It was a cold, clammy object; and, pressing upon his hot skin, woke him at once. He started as if a pin had been thrust into him; and the cry which he uttered awoke also his companions. Was it a snake that had touched him? François thought so at the moment, and continued to think so while he was rubbing his eyes open. When this feat was accomplished, however, he caught a glimpse of some object running off, that could not be a snake.

“What do you think it was?” inquired Basil and Lucien, in the same breath.

“A wolf, I think,” replied François. “It was his cold nose I felt. See! yonder it goes. See—see—there are two of them!”

François pointed in the direction in which the two animals were seen to run. Basil and Lucien looked, and saw them as well. They were about the size of wolves, but appeared to be quite black, and not like wolves at all. What could they be? They had

suddenly passed into a darker aisle among the trees, and the boys had only caught a glimpse of them as they went in. They could still distinguish their two bodies in the shade, but nothing more. What could they be? Perhaps javalies? This thought, no doubt, occurred to the brothers, because of their late adventure with these animals.

“They are too large, and run too clumsily, for javalies,” said Lucien.

“Bears?” suggested François.

“No, no; they are not large enough for bears.”

All three were puzzled.

They had risen upon their hands and knees, disencumbered themselves of their blankets, and each had grasped his gun, which they always kept close by them when asleep.

They remained in this position, straining their eyes up the gloomy alley after the two black objects that had stopped about fifty yards distant. All at once the form of a man rose up before them, and directly in front of the animals. Instead of retreating from the latter, as the boys expected, the upright figure stood still. To their further astonishment, the two animals ran up to it, and appeared to leap against it, as if making an attack upon it! But this could not be—since the figure did not move from its place, as one would have done who had been attacked. On the contrary, after a while, it stooped down, and appeared to be caressing them!

“A man and two dogs,” whispered François; “perhaps an Indian!”

“It may be a man,” returned Lucien, also speaking in a whisper. “I know not what else it could be; but those are no dogs, or I never saw such.”

This Lucien uttered with emphasis and in a serious tone, that caused the brothers to draw closer to each other.

During all this time Marengo stood by, restrained by them from rushing forward. The dog had not awaked until the first cry of François roused him. He was wearied

with the long gallop of the preceding days; and, like his masters, had been sleeping soundly. As all started almost simultaneously, a word from Basil had kept him in—for to this he had been well trained—and without a signal from him he was not used to attack any creature, not even his natural enemies. He therefore stood still, looking steadily in the same direction as they, and at intervals uttering a low growl that was almost inaudible. There was a fierceness about it, however, that showed he did not regard the strange objects as friends. Perhaps he knew what they were, better than any of the party.

The three mysterious creatures still remained near the same spot, and about fifty yards from the boys. They did not remain motionless though. The two smaller ones ran over the ground—now separating from the upright figure and then returning again, and appearing to caress it as before. The latter now and then stooped, as if to receive their caresses, and—when they were not by—as though it was gathering something from the ground. It would then rise into an upright position, and remain motionless as before. All their manoeuvres were performed in perfect silence.

There was something mysterious—awe-inspiring in these movements; and our young hunters observed them, not without feelings of terror. They were both puzzled and awed. They scarcely knew what course to adopt. They talked in whispers, giving their counsels to each other. Should they creep to their horses, mount, and ride off? That would be of no use; for if what they saw was an Indian, there were, no doubt, others near; and they could easily track and overtake them. They felt certain that the strange creatures knew they were there—for indeed their horses, some thirty yards off, could be plainly heard stamping the ground and cropping the grass. Moreover, one of the two animals had touched and smelt François; so there could be no mistake about it being aware of their presence. It would be idle, therefore, to attempt getting off unawares. What then? Should they climb into a tree? That, thought they, would be of just as little use; and they gave up the idea. They resolved, at length, to remain where they were, until they should either be assailed by their mysterious neighbours,

or the clearer light might enable them to make out who and what these were.

As it grew clearer, however, their awe was not diminished; for they now saw that the upright figure had two thick strong-looking arms, which it held out horizontally, manoeuvring with them in a singular manner. Its colour, too, appeared reddish, while that of the small animals was deep black! Had they been in the forests of Africa, or South instead of North America, they would have taken the larger figure for that of a gigantic ape. As it was, they knew it could not be that.

The light suddenly became brighter—a cloud having passed off the eastern sky. Objects could be seen more distinctly, and then the mystery, that had so long held the young hunters in torturing suspense, was solved. The large animal reared up and stood with its side towards them; and its long pointed snout, its short erect ears, its thick body and shaggy coat of hair, showed that it was no Indian nor human creature of any sort, but a huge bear standing upright on its hams.

“A she-bear and her cubs!” exclaimed François; “but see!” he continued, “she is red, while the cubs are jet-black!”

Basil did not stop for any observation of that kind. He had sprung to his feet and levelled his rifle, the moment he saw what the animal was.

“For your life do not fire!” cried Lucien. “It may be a grizzly bear!”

His advice came too late. The crack of Basil’s rifle was heard; and the bear dropping upon all fours, danced over the ground shaking her head and snorting furiously. The light had deceived Basil; and instead of hitting her in the head as he had intended, his bullet glanced from her snout, doing her but little harm. Now, the snout of a bear is its most precious and tender organ, and a blow upon that will rouse even the most timid species of them to fury. So it was with this one. She saw whence the shot came; and, as soon as she had given her head a few shakes, she came in a shuffling gallop towards the boys.

Basil now saw how rashly he had acted, but there was no time for expressing

regrets. There was not even time for them to get to their horses. Before they could reach these and draw the pickets, the bear would overtake them. Some one of them would become a victim.

“Take to the trees!” shouted Lucien; “if it be a grizzly bear, she cannot climb.”

As Lucien said this, he levelled his short rifle and fired at the advancing animal. The bullet seemed to strike her on the flank, as she turned with a growl and bit the part. This delayed her for a moment, and allowed Lucien time to swing himself to a tree. Basil had thrown away his rifle, not having time to reload. François, when he saw the great monster so near, dropped his gun without firing.

All three in their haste climbed separate trees. It was a grove of white oaks, as we have already stated; and these trees, unlike the pines, or magnolias, or cypress-trees, have usually great limbs growing low down and spreading out horizontally. These limbs are often as many feet in length as the tree itself is in height.

It was upon these that they had climbed—Basil having taken to that one under which they had slept, and which was much larger than the others around. At the foot of this tree the bear stopped. The robes and blankets drew her attention for the moment. She tossed them over with her great paws, and then left them, and walked round the trunk, looking upward, at intervals uttering loud “sniffs,” that sounded like the “’scape” of a steam-pipe. By this time Basil had reached the third or fourth branch from the ground. He might have gone much higher; but, from what Lucien had suggested, he believed the animal to be a grizzly bear. Her colour, which was of a fern or fulvous brown, confirmed him in that belief—as he knew that grizzly bears are met with of a great variety of colours. He had nothing to fear then, even on the lowest branch, and he thought it was no use going higher. So he stopped and looked down. He had a good view of the animal below; and to his consternation he saw at a glance that it was not a grizzly, but a different species. Her shape, as well as general appearance, convinced him it was the “cinnamon” bear—a variety of the black, and

one of the best tree-climbers of the kind. This was soon put beyond dispute, as Basil saw the animal throw her great paws around the trunk, and commence crawling upward!

It was a fearful moment. Lucien and François both leaped back to the ground, uttering shouts of warning and despair. François picked up his gun, and without hesitating a moment ran to the foot of the tree, and fired both barrels into the hips of the bear. The small shot hardly could have penetrated her thick shaggy hide. It only served to irritate her afresh, causing her to growl fiercely; and she paused for some moments, as if considering whether she would descend and punish the "enemy in the rear," or keep on after Basil. The rattling of the latter among the branches above decided her, and on she crawled upward.

Basil was almost as active among the branches of a tree as a squirrel or a monkey. When about sixty feet from the ground, he crawled out upon a long limb that grew horizontally. He chose this one, because he saw another growing above it, which he thought he might reach as soon as the bear followed him out upon the first; and by this means get back to the main trunk before the bear, and down to the ground again. After getting out upon the limb, however, he saw that he had miscalculated. The branch upon which he was, bending down under his weight, so widened the distance between it and the one above, that he could not reach the latter, even with the tips of his fingers. He turned to go back. To his horror the bear was at the other end in the fork, and preparing to follow him along the limb!

He could not go back without meeting the fierce brute in the teeth. There was no branch below within his reach, and none above, and he was fifty feet from the ground. To leap down appeared the only alternative to escape the clutches of the bear, and that alternative was certain death!

The bear advanced along the limb. François and Lucien screamed below, loading their pieces as rapidly as they could; but they feared they would be too late.

It was a terrible situation; but it was in such emergencies that the strong mind of Basil best displayed itself; and, instead of yielding to despair, he appeared cool and collected. His mind was busy examining every chance that offered.

All at once a thought struck him; and, obedient to its impulse, he called to his brothers below,—

“A rope! a rope! Fling me a rope! Haste! for heaven’s sake haste! a rope, or I am lost!”

Fortunately, there lay a rope under the tree. It was a raw-hide lasso, used in packing Jeanette. It lay by the spot where they had slept.

Lucien dropped his half-loaded rifle, and sprang towards it, coiling it as he took it up. Lucien could throw a lasso almost as well as Basil himself; and that was equal to a Mexican “vaquero” or a “gaucho” of the Pampas. He ran nearly under the limb, twirled the lasso around his head, and launched it upwards.

Basil, to gain time, had crept out upon the limb as far as it would bear him, while his fierce pursuer followed after. The branch, under their united weight, bent downward like a bow. Fortunately, it was oak, and did not break.

Basil was astride, his face turned to the tree and towards his pursuer. The long snout of the latter was within three feet of his head, and he could feel her warm breath, as with open jaws she stretched forward, snorting fiercely.

At this moment the ring-end of the lasso struck the branch directly between them, passing a few feet over it. Before it could slip back again, and fall off, the young hunter had grasped it; and with the dexterity of a packer, double-knotted it around the limb. The next moment, and just as the great claws of the bear were stretched forth to clutch him, he slipped off the branch, and glided down the lasso.

The rope did not reach the ground by at least twenty feet! It was a short one, and part of it had been taken up in the hasty knotting. Lucien and François, in consternation, had observed this from below, as soon as it first hung down. They had

observed it, and prepared themselves accordingly; so that, when Basil reached the end of the rope, he saw his brothers standing below, and holding a large buffalo-skin stretched out between them. Into this he dropped; and the next moment stood upon the ground unhurt.

And now came the moment of triumph. The tough limb, that had been held retent by Basil's weight, becoming so suddenly released, flew upward with a jerk.

The unexpected violence of that jerk was too much for the bear. Her hold gave way; she was shot into the air several feet upwards, and falling with a dull heavy sound to the earth, lay for a moment motionless! She was only stunned however, and would soon have struggled up again to renew the attack; but, before she could regain her feet, Basil had laid hold of François' half-loaded gun; and, hurriedly pouring down a handful of bullets, ran forward and fired them into her head, killing her upon the spot!

The cubs by this time had arrived upon the ground, and Marengo, who had now partially recovered, by way of revenging himself for the castigation he had received from their mother, attacked them with fury. The little creatures fought fiercely; and, together, would have been more than a match for Marengo; but the rifles of his masters came to his assistance, and put an end to the contest.

Chapter Nineteen.

Jerking a Bear.

All three—old bear and cubs—now lay stretched along the grass dead as may be. A rare-looking trio they were. The old one could not have weighed less than five hundred pounds. Her long, rough coat was of a fawn, or cinnamon colour, while the cubs were of a uniform black. This, however, is quite a common thing; and, what is still more singular, the cubs of the black bear are often seen of a reddish or cinnamon colour, while the mother herself is pure black. No doubt the cubs when

full-grown change to the colour of their own species; but even at all ages bears of the same species are found varying in colour from difference of climate or other circumstances.

On the continent of North America, say the naturalists, but three species of bears are found, viz the “black,” the “polar,” and the “grizzly.” This is not certain, however, for the cinnamon bear, of which we have been speaking, is probably a species distinct from the black. If so, there are four kinds on that continent, and, perhaps, a fifth; as the brown bear of the Hudson’s Bay furriers, hitherto set down as a variety of the black, is more likely the Russian or brown bear of Europe. It may have reached the American continent by Kamschatka, where it is a common species.

The polar bear is found only in the snowy regions that border the Arctic Ocean; and never ranges above one hundred miles from the sea. The “grizzly,” for strength, courage, and ferocity, takes the first place among the bear family—outranking even his white cousin of the north. We shall have more to say of him by-and-bye. The black bear is our present subject; and as all that is known of the cinnamon variety goes to show that its habits are similar to those of the black, what is here said of the one may be considered applicable to both.

The black bear (Ursus Americanus) is said to resemble the brown bear of Europe. I can see no resemblance. There is enough of difference, certainly, to constitute them separate and distinct species. The former has one molar tooth more than the latter; besides, the profile of the black bear is not so much arched, or convex, as that of the brown. In every respect, except habits, they are unlike each other. Their habits are nearly similar.

The whole American continent is the range of the black bear. He can live, and no doubt enjoy life, in all climates. He is equally at home in the icy regions of Canada and the tropic swamps of Louisiana. He is found from the shores of the Atlantic to the Pacific. He inhabits thick forests, and ranges in rocky desert regions, where

scarcely any timber grows. He prefers wooded districts, however; and in these is most commonly met with.

Black bears were very plentiful in America previous to its colonisation by the whites. The demand for their skins caused them to be much hunted since that event; and of course they are growing less numerous every day. The fur companies during the last hundred years have obtained thousands upon thousands of their skins both from white and Indian hunters. There are still many of these animals found in wild, unsettled parts; and even in the old and long-inhabited states they are occasionally met with in secluded and mountainous districts. You would wonder that they have not been extirpated long ago—being such large creatures, easily discovered and easily tracked; besides, it is always an ambition with the settlers and amateur-hunters to kill them. Moreover, but two cubs are produced at a litter, and that only happens once a-year. The fact is, that during winter, when the snow is on the ground and the bear might be easily tracked and destroyed, he does not show himself, but lies torpid in his den—which is either a cave in the rocks or a hollow tree. This happens only in the northern countries, where there are snows and severe winters. In these he disappears for several months, hiding himself in his dark lair, and living, as the hunters assert, by “sucking his paws.” This assertion, however, I will not attempt to corroborate. All I can say is, that he retires to his lurking-place as “fat as butter,” and comes out again in early spring as “thin as a rail.”

There is another curious fact about bears, that, to some extent, explains why they are not easily exterminated. It is this: the old she-animals are never killed during the period of gestation—for they are never met with at that time. It has been said there is no hunter to be found in all America who remembers having killed a she-bear with young, either of the black or grizzly species. Now this is not the case with most other animals—such as foxes and wolves—which are often killed with a whole litter of young, many of their species being thus destroyed at once.

The she-bear brings forth in winter in the deep recesses of some cave, where she has lain hid during the whole period of her gestation; and on this account while with young, she rarely, if ever, falls a victim to the hunters. When the cubs are large enough to go abroad, she takes them out, treating them with as much tenderness as a mother would her children. She will lay down her life for them at any time, defending them with great courage when attacked. It has been said that, like the alligator-mother, she is sometimes called upon to protect them from their savage fathers, who would devour them if they could. This I do not believe.

The black bears are omnivorous. They will eat fish, flesh, fowl, and vegetables. They are fond of all kinds of berries and sweet fruits. They “go crazed” after honey, climbing bee-trees and robbing the nests. They dig for roots—such as groundnuts and prairie-turnips. They lick up the larva of insects greedily, turning over great logs to get at them. In the south they tear open the nests of turtles and alligators, and devour the eggs; and, where there are settlements, they steal into the fields and eat quantities of young corn and potatoes, making sad havoc with the crops. They will devour pigs and other animals, eating their flesh—it might be said, alive—as they do not stop to kill them, but eat while tearing them to pieces. They will satisfy their hunger with putrid carcass, or, in short, with anything that is eatable by any other creature.

Notwithstanding the disgusting variety of his food, the flesh of the black bear is very palatable. It is a treat among the Indians and white hunters—particularly the large fat paws, which are esteemed the “tit-bits.” It is, perhaps, because these people are so fond of them, that they are led to believe the bear himself must be so, and therefore during his winter retirement entertains himself by sucking them.

There are many ways of capturing the bear. He is hunted by trained hounds. When thus attacked he will run straight on for ten miles, if his pursuers do not press him too close. When overtaken, however, he turns upon the dogs; and, should one of the

latter come near enough, a single blow of his paws will usually send it sprawling. He runs awkwardly on his plantigrade feet; but, although from his great length and size he appears to move but slowly, it is not so. He manages to shuffle over the ground much more rapidly than one would suppose. He can overtake a man on foot—although a mounted hunter, with his dogs, will easily overtake him. When he finds that he cannot escape by running, he takes to a tree; and, having clambered high up, tries to hide himself among the leaves. He does not often succeed in this, as the keen noses of the hounds guide them to the right tree, where they stand barking and howling until the hunters come up. These finding the bear "treed," rarely fail to bring him down with their rifles. He will then, if only wounded, fight fiercely both with dogs and hunters; but it is only at such times that the black bear will contend with man; as, when not attacked by the latter, he will never attack him. When wounded, however, or assailed by the hunter, he becomes a dangerous antagonist; and men have been dreadfully mutilated and torn on such occasions, escaping only with their lives. Some there are who have been nearly crushed to death by his "hug."

The black bear is often trapped and snared, in various ways—such as by log-traps, nooses tied to bent saplings, dead-falls, and steel-traps—and he is thus caught much more readily than either the lynx, the fox, or the wolf.

It would be easy to fill a volume with anecdotes and adventures in which the black bear figures as the hero. Many stories of his peculiar habits are related in the back settlements of America, some of which are true, while others partake largely of exaggeration. We have not room for these, however; and I have given you only facts, such as will enable you to form some idea of the general habits of this animal.

Most of these facts were communicated by Lucien to his brothers, while they were engaged in preparing their breakfast; and, as all three were very hungry, this was the first thing that occupied them after the bears had been killed.

The breakfast consisted of part of a cub, which was cleared of the hair by being

singed, and then roasted. They knew that bear-meat, like pork, is spoiled by skinning; and they followed the Indian fashion of preparing it. They made a hearty meal, as the cub-meat proved both tender and juicy—having a flavour something between young pork and veal. Of course, Marengo had his breakfast as well, coming in for refuse bits enough to have filled a large basket. The feet, however, which would have fallen to his share, had it been a deer or a buffalo, he did not get. Our young hunters had eaten bear-paws before; and, of coarse, reserved these delicate morsels to themselves.

As soon as breakfast was finished, and their animals had been led to the water, the brothers met together in a "council of three." It was necessary to take into consideration how they should now act. Their circumstances were very much altered. The whole of their provisions of dried meat, flour, and coffee, had been dropped by Jeanette in her flight, and, of course, eaten up or destroyed by the javalies. Henceforth they would have to depend entirely on their guns to supply them. The loss of their tent did not vex them, as in the fine summer weather, which they then had, they thought nothing of sleeping in the open air. But to be deprived of their coffee, that much-prized luxury of the prairie traveller, was a great chagrin. However, as Basil observed, they would have to get along without it. It would not be long before they should come across the buffalo, and with the delicious "hump-ribs" in plenty, hunters rarely long for other luxuries. All three felt satisfied that the buffalo-range was not far off, and that by keeping due westward they would soon be gratified with the sight of large droves of these animals. They resolved, however, to act with caution. They had heard that many tracts of the prairies are almost barren of game. With this fact before their minds, they were not going to leave so much good food behind them as appeared to be in the carcass of the bear. She therefore must be "jerked," and packed upon Jeanette, in lieu of the load which the latter had kicked off. So, with these intentions, Basil and François set to skinning her, while Lucien commenced collecting dry wood for a large fire. Of course they intended staying

another night in the same camp, as it would take a day, at least, to “jerk” the bear-meat.

The bear was soon skinned and cut up into thin slices and strips—for that is the mode adopted in “jerking,” or preserving without salt. It is usual to cure the meat by simply hanging it over poles or lines, in a hot sun; where it will dry sufficiently in three days, so that there will be no risk of its spoiling afterwards. But our adventurers did not wish to be detained so long, and therefore adopted another mode of curing it—that was by “barbecueing” it slightly over a fire. This was the plan:—A shallow pit was scooped out in the ground, and across it were laid green saplings, parallel to each other. Into the pit were thrown embers and red cinders, so as to give up a considerable heat. Upon the saplings thin slices of the meat were laid—as on a gridiron—so that they might become dried and slightly toasted at the same time. Meat cured in this way will keep for months; and the Indians and hunters usually adopt this plan, when they have no time to wait for a regular “jerking.”

The second cub was singed, and cut up without skinning, as pork usually is. It was roasted, to be ready for eating at once—as they designed bringing it “to the table” before many hours.

While the meat was drying, Basil melted some of the fat in the kettle, which fortunately was one of the utensils that still remained. With this fat—which beyond a doubt was genuine bear’s grease—he anointed poor Jeanette’s shanks, that had been almost clean skinned by the teeth of the javalies. She had been suffering with them ever since, and the application of the bear’s grease seemed to give her great relief.

Chapter Twenty.

A Nocturnal Adventure.

When night came again the young hunters went to sleep by the fire. As it had

suddenly grown chilly, they lay with their feet towards it, such being the usual practice of hunters when sleeping by a fire. When the feet are warm, the remainder of the body can easily be kept so; but, on the contrary, when one's feet become cold, it is scarcely possible to sleep. They were not troubled with cold, and all three were soon sleeping soundly.

From the necessity of supplying the barbecue every now and then with fresh embers, a large fire had been kept up during the day. It still continued to blaze and crackle in a bright red pile. The meat remained resting upon the saplings, where it had been placed to dry.

No one had thought of keeping watch. When camping out at night, in their hunting expeditions in the swamps of Louisiana, they had not accustomed themselves to this habit, and they did not think of its being necessary here. It is the fear of Indians alone that causes the prairie traveller to keep sentry during the live-long night; but our young hunters had much less fear of them than might be supposed. There had been as yet no hostilities in this quarter between whites and Indians; besides, Basil knew that he carried a token of friendship should the latter come upon them.

They had not been more than half-an-hour asleep when a growl from Marengo awoke them. They all started up into a sitting posture, and looked anxiously out into the darkness. They could see nothing strange. The great trunks of the trees, with the long silvery moss of whitish hue, were glistening in the light of the still blazing fire. All the space between was gloomy and black as ebony. They could hear nothing that sounded strange. There was not a breath of air stirring, so that the trees were still and silent, as if asleep. Only up among their leaves and high tops, the tree-frogs (Hyloidea) and cicadas kept up their continuous music. Amid their numerous and varied calls could be distinguished the "ll–l–luk" of the tree-toad (Hyla versicolor); and from the aquatic plants, that lined the spring close by, came the merry chirrup of the Hylodes gryllus, or "Savanna cricket." Far up among the leaves of the oaks the

little green tree-frog repeated his tinkling bell-like note that fell with a pleasant sound upon the ear. But all these were the usual voices of the night—the voices of the southern forest—and they produced no strange impression upon the listening hunters. The call of the Hyla, indeed—loud and oft-repeated as it was—warned them that a rain-storm was near; and the darkness of the sky above confirmed the warning.

But it was not these sounds that had caused Marengo to spring up with such a savage growl; and the boys continued attentively listening to discover what it could have been.

The dark aisles of the forest sparkled with moving lights. The fire-flies were abroad in thousands; and their phosphoric lamps, more than usually luminous, also betokened the approach of a rain-storm.

As the young hunters gazed, other lights attracted their attention, causing them to hold their guns in readiness. These lights were very different from those of the insects. They were low down near the surface of the ground. They were round, of a fiery green lustre, and appeared in motion. Now they remained shining steadily for some moments, then they disappeared, but immediately shone out afresh in some other place. There were many of them moving about. They were not fire-flies.

Our hunters knew what they were—they were the eyes of animals—of wild beasts! This they knew, but no more. What sort of animals they might be was a thing about which they were all three ignorant; and this uncertainty very naturally filled them with dread. They might be bears, wolverines, or panthers.

The boys talked in whispers, looking to the locks of their pieces, and preparing themselves for the worst. They were, of course, already seen by the animals, sitting as they did in the light of the fire. Marengo stood by, looking into the darkness, and at intervals uttering the growl with which he was accustomed to hail the presence of an enemy.

The shining eyes appeared to multiply. All at once a dog was heard to utter three distinct barks. Was it a dog? No. The long and piteous howl that followed told that the animal was no dog, but a wolf—the barking-wolf (Canis latrans). The moment it had ceased, another took up the strain, and then another and another, until the woods rang on all sides with their hideous howls. This did not come from any particular side, but seemed everywhere; and as the boys looked into the dark aisles between the tree-trunks, they could perceive glancing eyes—a perfect circle of them all around!

"Bah!" cried Basil, now breaking silence, "it's only a pack of prairie-wolves. Who cares for their howling?"

The minds of all were thus set at rest. They had no fear of prairie-wolves; which, though fierce enough when attacking some poor deer or wounded buffalo, are afraid of anything in the shape of man; and will skulk off, whenever they think the latter has any intention to attack them. This, however, is seldom the case, as the prairie hunter does not care to waste a bullet upon them; and they are often permitted to follow, and squat themselves unmolested around the hunter's camp, within reach of his rifle.

The prairie-wolves are much smaller than any other species of wolf found in America. They are not much larger than English terriers, and quite as cunning as the English fox. They can hardly be caught or trapped in any way—though they can be easily run down with horses and dogs. They are of a dull, reddish hue, mixed with a grizzle of white hairs. This is their usual colour, though, like other animals, there are varieties. They have thick bushy tails, black at the tips, and one-third the length of their bodies. They resemble the dogs found among the prairie Indians, of which they are, no doubt, the progenitors. They are met with throughout all the regions from the Mississippi westward to the Pacific, and southward into Mexico. They hunt in packs, like the jackals; and will run down deer, buffaloes, or any other animals

which they think they can master. They dare not attack a buffalo in the herd, though packs of them always follow a drove of these animals. They wait until some one gets separated—a young calf, or, perhaps, a decrepit old bull—which they fall upon and worry to pieces. They follow all parties of hunters and travellers—taking possession of a camp-ground, the moment its occupants have moved out, and devouring every scrap of eatables that may have been left behind. They will, even, sometimes steal into the camp by night, and appropriate the very morsel which the hunter had designed for his breakfast in the morning. This sometimes leads to a spirit of retaliation; and the indignant hunter, growing less provident of his powder and lead, cracks away until he has laid several of them stretched along the grass.

They are more numerous than any other species of American wolves; and on this account—having so many mouths to feed, and so many stomachs to satisfy—they often suffer from extreme hunger. Then, but not till then, they will eat fruits, roots, and vegetables—in short, anything that may sustain life.

These wolves take their trivial name from their being met with principally on the great prairies of the west—although other species of American wolves are found in the prairie country as well as they. They are sometimes called “barking” wolves; because, as we have noticed, the first two or three notes of their howl resemble the bark of a dog. It ends, however, in a prolonged and disagreeable scream.

“I am glad it is they,” said Lucien, in reply to Basil’s remark. “It is well it is no worse. I was afraid it was our friends, the javalies, who had come to pay us a visit.”

“Bad enough as it is,” said Basil. “We shall now have to keep awake, and guard the meat, or these skulking jackals would not leave us an ounce of it by morning.”

“That is true enough,” replied Lucien; “but we need not all watch. You and François go to sleep. I’ll stand sentry.”

“No,” responded Basil. “Go you and François to sleep. Let me keep watch.”

“Brothers,” said François, “I am not a bit sleepy; let me be the sentry. I’ll keep ’em

off."

"No, no," exclaimed Basil and Lucien, in a breath, "I—I."

It was finally agreed that Basil should take the watch for a couple of hours or so—until he became sleepy—when he was to awake and be relieved by Lucien; who, in his turn, could arouse François. This being arranged, the two latter wrapped themselves in their blankets and lay down again, while Basil sat alone, now gazing into the fire, and then into the gloomy darkness beyond.

Both Lucien and François, notwithstanding the declaration of the latter, were soon snoring like a brace of tops. They had had an early awaking by the bear-scrape of the previous morning; besides, they had been at work all day, and were wearied. This they must have been, to have gone to sleep with such a discordant howling around them—enough to have kept an opium-eater awake. Basil was wearied as well as they; and he soon began to feel what a painful thing it is to keep awake when one is sleepy. The eyes of the wolves continued to glare upon him from all sides; but he did not dread them any more, than if they had been so many hares. There appeared to be a very large pack of them though. The odoriferous bear-meat had, no doubt, collected all there were for miles around—in addition to numbers that had been following the trail for days past. As Basil watched them, he saw they were growing bolder, and gradually approaching nearer. At length, some of them came upon the spot, where lay the bones of the bear at some distance out from the fire. These they attacked at once; and through the dim light Basil could see them rushing from all quarters to come in for a share. He could hear the bones cracking under their teeth, and could see them struggling and worrying the skeleton and each other in a moving mass. This soon ended. The bones were scraped clean in a twinkling; and the wolves now left them, and scattered over the ground as before.

"Come," soliloquised Basil, "I must have more light; they may steal a march upon me;" and he rose up and threw several armfuls of wood upon the fire, which soon

blazed up again, reflecting the yellow eyes of the wolves in dozens of pairs all around him. This helped to brighten Basil a little, and keep him awake; but he sat down again by the fire, and soon became drowsy as before. Every now and then he caught himself nodding; and, each time, as he shook himself awake, he noticed that the wolves had ventured nearer to the bear-meat. He could easily have shot any one of them, and thus drive them off for a time; but he did not wish either to waste his ammunition, or startle his companions.

As he sat cogitating how he would best keep awake, an idea came into his head, which caused him to leap to his feet, as if he intended to execute some purpose.

“I have it now,” said he to himself, placing his rifle against a tree. “I’ll get a good nap yet in spite of these filthy yelpers. Strange we didn’t think of the plan before.”

He took up a lasso, and, proceeding to the barbecue, which was close by, commenced laying all the pieces of bear-meat on one end of the rope. This did not occupy him long; and, when he had bundled all and looped them securely together, he flung the other end of the lasso over a high branch, until it hung down so that he could reach it. He now pulleyed up the meat—until it was ten feet or more from the ground—and then fastened his rope to a log.

“Now, gentlemen,” muttered he, fancifully addressing the wolves, “you may prowl about and howl till your throats are sore, but you don’t keep me five minutes longer from my rest—that you don’t.”

So saying, he laid himself down, and commenced wrapping himself in his blankets.

“Ha!” he continued, as he caught a glimpse of several of the animals running forward and looking upwards at the swinging meat; “Ha! Messieurs Loups, don’t you wish you may get it? Ha! ha! ha! Good night!”

So speaking and laughing, he stretched himself alongside his brothers, and in five minutes’ time was snoring as loudly as either of them.

But Basil, with all his craft, was not so cunning upon the present occasion as he

thought himself—not half so cunning as the wolves, whom he believed he had outwitted. The latter, seeing that he had gone to sleep, boldly drew nearer and nearer, until scores of them covered the spot over which hung the meat. Here they ran about, tumbling over each other, and all looking upward. They remained silent, however, lest they might awake the sleepers. Some sat quietly on their hams with eyes fixed on the tempting morsel, but not making any effort to get at it, as they knew it was beyond their reach. These were, no doubt, the older and wiser ones. Others kept trying their prowess in lofty leaping; but, although the most active of them could get their noses within a few inches of the meat, it only tantalised them the more. One, however, who seemed the best jumper of the pack, at last succeeded in snatching a small piece that hung lower than the main bunch. He was immediately set upon as soon as he had touched the ground, and chased and worried by the rest, until he was glad to drop the morsel to save himself. His success, however, emboldened others to try; and they went on springing upward as before—but to no purpose.

A new idea, however, seemed now to have got into the heads of the older ones; they who up to this time had sat looking on. Several of these ran towards the log, where the lasso was tied; and, seizing the latter in their teeth, commenced gnawing it! It did not take them long to accomplish their purpose. In less than two minutes' time, the heavy mass came down with a dead sound upon the shoulders of one of the pack, causing him to howl fearfully!

Marengo, who had been alert all this time, now growled louder than ever; and the combined noises awoke the three sleepers. Basil saw what it was; and, starting up, seized his rifle and ran forward, followed by François and Lucien.

All three dashed in among the wolves, firing their pieces as they ran, and then rushing on them with "clubbed" guns. The animals, of course, took to their heels, and scattered in every direction; but some of them, in their flight, did not fail to

carry off choice pieces of the bear-meat. Two were killed by the rifle-bullets; and a third—which François had peppered with shot—was overtaken and worried to death by Marengo.

The meat was soon gathered up; and Basil, who though somewhat chagrined was still confident of his plan, once more looped it in the lasso, and pulleyed it up. This time, however, he tied the end of his rope to the high branch of a tree; and as the wolves are not tree-climbers, all felt certain that, cunning as these creatures are, they could not reach it thus secured.

After throwing more wood upon the fire, the three brothers again took to their blankets, expecting that nothing would occur to disturb them before the morning.

Chapter Twenty One.

The Circle of Fire.

That expectation, however, was a vain one. Poor lads! they little thought what was before them. Their nerves were to be tried still farther, and by as severe a test as they had yet endured. The wolves howled fearfully around the camp, and their eyes still shone through the gloom. But this would not have kept the boys from sleeping, had their attention not been called to another sound—the voice of a far different creature. They heard it amidst the howlings of the wolves, and knew it at once, for it resembled not these. It was more like the squalling of an angry cat, but far louder, fiercer, and more terrible. It was the scream of the cougar!

I say that the young hunters recognised the voice of this animal at once—for they had heard it while hunting in the forests of Louisiana, although they had never been exposed to its attack. From ample testimony, however, they knew its power and fierce nature; and were, therefore, terrified by its scream—as men of strongest nerves had often been before them.

When its cry first reached their ears, it appeared feeble and distant—not louder than

the mewing of a kitten. The animal was evidently far off in the forest. They knew, however, that it could soon traverse the ground that lay between it and their camp. They listened. A second scream sounded nearer. They sprang to their feet, and listened again. A third call appeared more distant. This, however, arose from a misconception on their part. They forgot that their ears were now farther from the ground.

They stood a moment gazing on each other with looks of terror and apprehension. What was to be done?

“Shall we mount our horses and fly?” asked Basil.

“We know not what way to go,” suggested Lucien. “We may ride right into its teeth!”

This was likely enough; for it is a singular fact that the scream of the cougar, like the roar of the lion, seems to come from any or every side. It is difficult to tell in what direction the animal is who utters it. Whether this illusion be produced by the terror of the listener is a question yet unsolved.

“What can we do?” said Basil. “Taking to a tree is of no use. These animals can climb like squirrels. What can we do?”

Lucien stood silent, as if considering.

“I have read,” said he, at length, “that the cougar will not cross fire. It is the case with most animals, although there are exceptions. Let us try that. Hush! Listen!”

All three remained silent. Again the cougar uttered his wild note, still far off.

“You hear,” continued Lucien; “he is distant yet. Perhaps he is not coming this way. It is best, however, to be prepared while we have time. Let us try the circle of fire!”

Both Basil and François understood what their brother meant. All three flung down their rifles and, rushing among the trees, collected dry wood in armfuls. Fortunately, this was in abundance near the spot. Some dead trees had fallen long ago; and their

branches, breaking into pieces as they fell, covered the ground with numerous fragments just fit for firewood. In the large pile already blazing, there was no lack of kindling stuff; and in a few minutes a complete circle of fires, almost touching one another, burnt upon the ground.

The boys had lost no time, working as if for their lives. It was well they did so; for the voice of the cougar, that they had heard at intervals, each time growing louder, now echoed through the aisles of the forest, drowning all other sounds. Strange to say, the howling of the wolves suddenly ceased, and these creatures were no longer to be heard. But there were other sounds audible—the stamping and snorting of the terrified horses. The young hunters, up to this time, had not thought of the safety of these poor animals. It was now too late to relieve them—the cougar was within a hundred yards of the camp!

All three, along with Marengo, placed themselves within the circle of fire. Fortunately, there was no wind—not a breath—and the smoke rose vertically upward, leaving them a breathing space within. There they stood, guns in hand. Around them the fires blazed and crackled; but above the snapping of the knots, and the hiss of the spurting piping tree gas, could be heard the wild cry of the cougar! It now became evident on what side the animal was; for, as the young hunters peered through the smoke and blaze, they could distinguish the yellow cat-like body, moving to and fro under the hanging meat. The rounded head, the long hollow back, the smooth tawny skin, were not to be mistaken. As if to add to their terrible situation, the boys now saw that not one, but a pair, of these fearful creatures were upon the ground, moving backward and forward, passing each other, and looking eagerly up at the meat where it hung.

It now occurred to the hunters what an oversight they had made, in not cutting down the meat. Had they done so, the cougars would no doubt have devoured it, and moved off after satisfying their hunger. Alas! it was too late for such a thought.

For several minutes the animals continued to walk backward and forward, eagerly eyeing the tempting object above them. Several times they sprang up, as if to seize it; but their efforts fell far short, and they desisted. One of them now ran up the tree, to which the lasso was fastened. His claws could be heard rattling upon the bark as he sprang upward. He first climbed to the branch over which the bear-meat hung. This he shook with violence, looking downward, to see if the suspended object would fall. Disappointed, he left this after a time, and came down to the other branch, where the lasso was tied in a knot. Here he again seized the rope in his claws, and shook it with violence, but with a like result. Although he had the advantage of the wolves in being able to climb the tree, he had not their cunning, else he would soon have let the meat down, by cutting the rope with his teeth. This idea, however, belonged to a higher development of brain than his; and, after seizing the lasso several times, and shaking it as before, he returned to the ground to his mate, who had sat all the while watching his manoeuvres.

These efforts to reach the meat occupied nearly an hour. During all that time the boys stood within the circle of fire, in the most distressing situation. They were half-roasted by the heat, that had been all along increasing, as the black logs burned into red embers. They had made their circle too small; and they stood as in the midst of a fiery furnace!

The smoke had partially cleared away, and they could witness every movement of the cougars; but the terrible heat that oppressed them had almost conquered their fear of these animals; and little would now have tempted them to rush forth and battle with them. The perspiration ran from every pore, and their guns felt like bars of hot iron!

“I can stand it no longer,” cried Basil; “let us fire at them, rush out, and take our chance.”

“Patience, brother,” replied Lucien. “One moment longer. Perhaps they may go

away."

As Lucien spoke, the cougars, who had now given up the bear's meat, stealthily approached the fire. They crept forward like cats, when stealing upon their prey. At intervals they uttered a strange sound, like the low cough of a person in consumption. They gave forth another sound, which fell equally strange upon the ears of the hunters. It resembled the purring of a cat when caressed; but was much louder, and, in the forest, now silent, could be heard at a considerable distance. It was too plainly heard by those who were near. Both uttered it, as if to encourage one another in their approach; and they kept crawling on, waving their tails as they advanced. When within a few feet of the fire, they stopped, and laid themselves almost flat along the ground—yet evidently prepared to spring forward at any moment. It was a terrible sight to look upon these fierce creatures as they lay. The light of the great fire made every part of them fearfully apparent. Their claws, their teeth, half uncovered, and even the bright irides of their shining eyes were seen distinctly. But they looked not half so fearful as at first. The young hunters now contemplated them from a different point of view. They were suffering where they stood, so fearfully, that there seemed no danger beyond that hot circle of fire—not even from the claws of a cougar!

"I shall stand it no longer," cried Basil. "We'll be roasted outright. You, brothers, take that one, I'll aim at this—so—now—fear not—fire!"

As Basil ceased speaking, the three cracks sounded almost together; and, as soon as they had fired, all three leaped out of the blazing cordon. Whether Lucien and François had missed their aim was not known until afterwards; but Basil had not missed his. He had wounded the cougar; and scarcely had the young hunters got clear of the fiery circle, when the infuriated animal sprang into it, and was seen, now upon its feet, and now rolling over the ground in the throes of death. Marengo attacked it; but both got among the red cinders, and the dog was fain to make his

escape out again. The cougar, left to itself, soon ceased its struggles, and lay upon the ground, to all appearance, dead.

But what of the other?

As all three stood listening, the snorting and stamping of horses fell upon their ears, and above all was heard the squealing of the mule Jeanette! This lasted for a few minutes, and at length all was silent as before.

“Poor Jeanette!” thought they. “The other has made a meal of her. Well—we must do without her, that’s all.”

They kept watch until daybreak, still fearful that the cougar might come back for its mate. The rain had now begun to fall, and poured down in torrents, drowning out their fires. They did not attempt to rekindle them; but stood, with their blankets around their shoulders, sheltering themselves as they best could under the trees.

When the daylight came, what was their surprise as well as joy to see Jeanette quietly browsing at the end of her trail-rope, and close by her the body of the cougar lying dead upon the ground! It had been wounded by the shots; but that, as they soon ascertained, was not the cause of its death, for its body was crushed and its ribs broken! For some time they could not understand this. At length, however, it was explained to them. The situation in which the animal was found enabled them to clear up the mystery. It was lying by the foot of a large tree, against which, no doubt, it had got the squeeze that had killed it. While retreating it had sprung upon Jeanette; and the latter, in her endeavours to escape, had in the darkness rushed violently against the tree, crushing the cougar, and killing it instantly!

The fierce brute had left the trace of its claws upon Jeanette’s back and withers; and a deep gash under her throat showed where its teeth had been buried. It was fortunate for the mule she had rushed against the tree, else the cougar would have held on until he had drunk the life-blood from her veins—as this is the mode by which these animals put their prey to death.

It was now morning, but the young hunters having been awake nearly all the night, were weary and could have gone to rest. This, however, they did not think prudent. They believed they had got themselves into a part of the forest where there were many dangerous creatures, and they came to the determination to shift their camp, and travel as far from the spot as possible before night. The truth is, they were upon a timbered stream—an affluent of the Trinity river; and as the latter was at this season overflowed, all the wild animals—bears, cougars, wolves, lynxes, and javalies—had been driven out of the low bottoms, and were roaming through the adjacent woods, more hungry and fierce than they commonly are.

Having saddled their horses, and packed Jeanette with their robes, blankets, and meat, our adventurers again took the route westward. After proceeding a few miles they issued from the woods, and struck out into the open prairie.

Chapter Twenty Two.

The Lone Mound.

Their route led them through one of those lovely landscapes which are met with only in this southern region—a flower-prairie. They travelled in the midst of flowers. Flowers were before them, behind, and on every side. Their shining corollas covered the prairie as far as the eye could see. There were golden sunflowers (helianthi), and red malvas, euphorbias, and purple lupins. There were the rose-coloured blossoms of the wild althea, and the brilliant orange of Californian poppies—glancing among the green leaves like so many balls of fire—while lower upon the surface grew the humble violas, sparkling like azure gems.

The glorious sun was shining over all; and the late rain that had washed them seemed to have added to the fragrance and brilliancy. Millions of butterflies flew over them, or rested in their soft cups, not less brilliant than the flowers themselves. Some of these were of vast dimensions, their downy wings speckled and striped with varied and gorgeous tints. There were other insects of gay colours and glancing

wings. The giant spider-fly flew around, now poised on whirring wing, and now darting off like a thread of lightning to some other part of the boundless garden. There were bees, too; and bee-birds humming from flower to flower, and robbing their rich nectaries. Now and then partridges and ruffed grouse whirred up before the horses; and François succeeded in shooting a brace of the latter, and hanging them behind his saddle.

Through these great flower-beds our travellers rode on, crushing many a beautiful corolla under their horses' hoofs. Sometimes the flowers grew upon tall stalks that stood thickly together, and reached up to the shoulders of the horses, completely hiding them from the view of one at a distance. Sometimes the travellers passed through beds of helianthi alone—whose large heads, brushing against their thighs, covered them with yellow pollen-dust.

It was, altogether, a rare and beautiful landscape; and the young hunters would have enjoyed it much, had they not been suffering from weariness and want of sleep. The fragrance of the flowers seemed at first to refresh them; but after a while they became sensible of a narcotic influence which it exercised over them, as they felt more sleepy than ever. They would have encamped among them, but there was no water; and without water they could not remain. There was no grass, either, for their animals; as, strange to say, upon these flower-prairies grass is seldom met with. The flower-stalks usurp the soil, and no turf is ever found about their roots. The travellers, therefore, were compelled to ride on, until they should reach some spot having grass and water—two of the necessary requisites of a "night-camp."

After proceeding about ten miles the flowers began to appear more thinly scattered over the surface, and at length declined into the grass prairie. Two or three miles farther brought our adventurers to a small "spring branch" that ran through the open plain, with no timber upon its banks, except a few willows. Here they were glad to halt for the night, and they dismounted, and staked their animals upon the tempting

sward.

All three were weary, and could have slept; but they were hungry as well, and must first eat—so they set about preparing supper. The willows were green, and would not burn very well; but by dint of perseverance they managed to make a fire. François' grouse were plunged into the kettle. These, seasoned with wild onions, nasturtium, and prairie-turnips—which Lucien had gathered along the route,—made a dish that was far from unpalatable. The stock of bear-meat was not touched—with the exception of a small piece, which, with the heads and other refuse parts of the grouse, formed the supper of Marengo. As soon as they had finished eating, the hunters spread their buffalo-robes upon the grass; and, drawing their blankets over them, went off into a sound sleep.

This night they were not disturbed. When awake they could hear the howling of wolves upon the distant prairie, and near their camp. But they were used to this serenading music, and did not regard it. All three slept soundly throughout the live-long night.

They were awake by grey dawn, and felt quite refreshed. They watered their horses, and prepared their breakfast of jerked bear-meat. This is not bad eating at any time; but to appetites like theirs it was a luxury indeed; and they broke their fast cleverly enough—eating nearly a pound a-piece. They all felt quite merry and jocund. Marengo was merry, though the claws of the cougar had scored his countenance sadly. Jeanette, too, frisked about, kicking at the flies as she fed. Basil had given her shanks a fresh touch of the bear's grease; and the scars which the cougar had made were likely to cicatrise speedily. They remained all next day by that sweet spring, and enjoyed another night of undisturbed rest. On the second morning they continued their journey, and in a few days reached the "Cross Timbers,"—those celebrated groves that have so long puzzled the speculations of the curious naturalist. Our travellers did not remain long by them—as they saw no signs of the

buffalo—but kept still farther to the west, crossing the head-waters of numerous streams that run into the river Brazos.

About the third day, after leaving the Cross Timbers, they encamped on one of these streams—a very small one—that meandered through the prairie, without any timber upon its banks. But our travellers did not feel the want of this, as they could make their fire out of an article—the sight of which had been gladdening their eyes during the whole of that day's journey. It was the bois de vache, or buffalo "chips," as it is called by the trappers; and they knew that where this was found, the buffaloes themselves would not be far off. They had now got within the range of these animals; and might expect to fall in with them at any moment.

As soon as the next day dawned, the eyes of our hunters sought the prairie, but as yet no buffaloes were in sight. Nothing could be seen but the green treeless plain, stretching on all sides as if to the very sky. Only one object could be observed that gave a variety to the aspect around. This was an eminence that rose over the sea-like surface of the prairie—called in the language of the hunters, a "butte." It appeared ten miles distant, at least; and seemed to stand alone, its steep sides rising like cliffs above the prairie level. It lay in the course they had hitherto been travelling.

"Shall we make for it?" asked they of one another.

"What better can we do?" said Basil. "We are as likely to meet the buffalo in that direction as in any other. We have no guide now; so we must trust to our good fortune to lead us to them, or them to us—which is about the same thing, I fancy."

"Oh! let us 'catch up,'" advised François, "and ride for the butte. We may find buffalo near it."

"But what if we find no water?" suggested the ever-prudent Lucien.

"That is not likely," returned François. "I'll warrant there's water—there generally is where there are mountains, I believe; and yonder butte might almost be called a mountain. I'll warrant there's water."

“If there’s not,” added Basil, “we can return here.”

“But, brothers,” said Lucien, “you know not the distance of that eminence.”

“Ten miles, I should think,” said Basil.

“Not more, certainly,” added François.

“It is thirty, if an inch,” quietly remarked Lucien.

“Thirty!” exclaimed the others; “thirty miles! You are jesting, are you not? Why, I could almost lay my hand upon it!”

“That is a misconception of yours,” rejoined the philosopher. “You are both calculating distances, as you would in the low dense atmosphere of Louisiana. Remember you are now four thousand feet above the level of the sea, and surrounded by one of the purest and most translucent atmospheres in the world. Objects can be seen double the distance that you could see them on the banks of the Mississippi. That butte, which you think is only ten miles off, appears to me fifteen, or rather more; and I therefore calculate that it is at least thirty miles distant from the spot where we now are.”

“Impossible!” exclaimed Basil, eyeing the butte. “Why, I can see the seams of the rocks on its sides, and trees, I fancy, growing upon its top.”

“Well,” continued Lucien, “with all that you’ll find I am not far from the mark. But let us strike for it, since you wish it. We shall meet with water there, I suppose; take notice, however,—we’ll have to journey all day before reaching it; and we may consider ourselves fortunate if we get there before night-fall.”

Lucien’s prudence was not too great. On the contrary, it was not even sufficient for the occasion. This arose from his want of experience on the prairies. If either he or his brothers had had a little more of this, they would have hesitated before striking out so boldly, and leaving the water behind them. They would have known that, to make a long journey, without the certainty of finding water at the end of it, is a risk

that even the old hunters themselves will seldom undertake. These, from experience, well know the danger of being without water on the prairies. They dread it more than grizzly bears, or panthers, or wolverines, or even hostile Indians. The fear of thirst is to them the greatest of all terrors.

Our young hunters felt but little of this fear. It is true they had, all of them, heard or read of the sufferings that prairie travellers sometimes endure from want of water. But people who live snugly at home, surrounded by springs, and wells, and streams, with cisterns, and reservoirs, and pipes, and hydrants, and jets, and fountains, playing at all times around them, are prone to underrate these sufferings; in fact, too prone, might I not say, to discredit everything that does not come under the sphere of their own observation? They will readily believe that their cat can open a door-latch, and their pig can be taught to play cards, and that their dog can do wonderful things, savouring of something more than instinct. But these same people will shake their heads incredulously, when I tell them that the opossum saves herself from an enemy by hanging suspended to the tree-branch by her tail, or that the big-horn will leap from a precipice lighting upon his horns, or that the red monkeys can bridge a stream by joining themselves to one another by their tails.

“Oh! nonsense!” they exclaim; “these things are too strange to be true.” And yet, when compared with the tricks their cat and dog can play, and even the little canary that flits about the drawing-room, do they seem either strange or improbable? The absent and distant are always regarded with wonder and incredulity; while familiar facts, in themselves far more wonderful, neither excite curiosity nor challenge credulity. Who now regards the startling phenomenon of the electric wire otherwise than as a simple truth easily comprehended? And yet there was a time—ah! there was a time—when to have proclaimed this truth would have rendered you or me ridiculous. There was a time, indeed, when it might have cost us our lives or our liberties. Remember Galileo!

I was saying, then, that people who live at home do not know what thirst is; for home is a place where there is always water. They cannot comprehend what it is to be in the desert without this necessary element. Ha! I know it; and I give you my word for it, it is a fearful thing.

Our young hunters had but a faint idea of its terrors. Hitherto their route had been through a well-watered region—scarcely ever running ten or a dozen miles without crossing some stream with timber upon it, which they could see a long way off, and thus guide themselves to the water; but they little understood the nature of the country that was now before them. They knew not that they were entering upon the desert plains—those vast arid steppes that slope up to the foots of the Rocky Mountains—the Cordilleras of the Northern Andes.

François, rash and impetuous, never dreamt of danger: Basil, courageous, did not fear it: Lucien had some misgivings, because he had heard or read more of it than the others. All, however, were curious to visit the strange, mound-looking eminence that rose out of the plain. This was quite natural. Even the rude savage and the matter-of-fact trapper often diverge from their course, impelled by a similar curiosity.

The horses were watered and saddled; Jeanette was packed; the water-gourds were filled; and our adventurers, having mounted, rode forward for the “butte.”

Chapter Twenty Three.

The Hunt of the Wild Horse.

“There must be buffalo in this neighbourhood,” said Basil, looking to the ground as they rode on. “These ‘chips’ are very fresh. They cannot have lain for many days. See! there is a buffalo-road covered with tracks!”

As Basil said this, he pointed to a trough-like hollow in the prairie, running as far as the eye could reach. It looked like the dry bed of a stream; but the hoof-tracks in the

bottom showed that it was what he had called it,—a buffalo-road, leading, no doubt, to some river or watering-place. It was so deep that, in riding along it, the heads of our travellers were on a level with the prairie. It had been thus hollowed out by the water during heavy rains, as the soil, previously loosened by the hoofs of the buffaloes, was then carried off to the rivers. Such roads the buffaloes follow at times, thousands of them keeping in the same trail. They travel thus when they are migrating in search of better pastures, or water—to which they know by experience the roads will conduct them.

Our hunters did not follow this road far, as there was no certainty that it would bring them to where the animals then were. They crossed over, and kept on for the butte.

“Voilà!” cried François, “what are these?” François pointed to several circular hollows that appeared in the prairie before them.

“Buffalo-wallows, I declare!” said Basil: “some of them are quite fresh too!”

“Buffalo-wallows!” echoed François; “what are they?”

“Why, have you never heard of them, Frank?” asked Basil. “Places where the buffalo wallow and tumble like horses and farm-cattle.”

“Oh, that’s it,” said François; “but what do they do it for?”

“Well, that I don’t know. Perhaps Luce can tell.”

“Some say,” said Lucien, thus appealed to, “they do it to scratch themselves, and get rid of the flies and other insects that annoy them. Others believe that they practise this curious exercise only by way of diversion.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed François, “what funny fellows they must be!”

“There is yet another more curious explanation,” continued Lucien, “which is this:—that the buffaloes make these hollows to catch water when it rains, so that they may come back to them and drink!”

“Ha! ha! ha!” again laughed François; “I can’t believe that, brother.”

"I would not have you neither," said Lucien; "of course, the supposition is not true—as the buffalo is not an animal possessing sufficient intelligence for that. It is only offered as a curious suggestion. It is certain, however, that the water collects in these holes during rain-time, and often remains there for days; and the buffaloes, wandering about, drink out of them. Therefore, it may, in one sense, be truly said that the buffaloes dig their own wells! These often prove of service to other animals, as well as those who have made them. Lost trappers and Indians have been saved by finding water in them, when otherwise they would have perished from thirst."

"How very round they are!" said François; "why, they are perfect circles! How do the buffaloes make them so?"

"By laying themselves out at full length and spinning round and round like a wagon wheel upon its nave. They revolve with great rapidity, using their humped shoulders as a pivot, and their legs as levers. They sometimes continue this motion for half-an-hour at a time. No doubt they do this, as has been said, to scratch themselves; for, notwithstanding their thick hides and hair, they are much annoyed by insect-parasites. They do it, too, for amusement, or to give themselves pleasure, which is the same thing. You have often witnessed horses at a similar exercise; and was it not evident that they took a pleasure in it? Have you not fancied so?"

"Oh, yes," cried François, "I am sure horses enjoy a good tumble."

"Well, then, it is to be supposed the buffaloes do the same. Getting rid of their tormentors, and pressing their hot sides into the fresh cool earth, is, no doubt, a source of enjoyment to them. They are not very cleanly; as they are often seen wandering about, so covered with dirt, that one cannot tell what colour their hide is."

"Well!" added François, "I hope we shall soon come across one with a white hide!"

Talking after this fashion, our young hunters continued their journey. They had ridden about ten miles, when Basil—whose eye was all the time wandering around the prairie horizon—uttered an exclamation, and suddenly reined up his horse. The

others, seeing him do so, stopped also.

“What do you see?” asked Lucien.

“I do not know,” replied Basil; “but there is something yonder upon the edge of the prairie—to the southward—do you see it?”

“Yes; it looks like a clump of low trees.”

“No,” said Basil; “they are not trees. This moment I saw one apart from the rest, and I do not see it now. It appeared to move in toward the mass. I fancy they are animals of some kind or other.”

“Buffaloes, I hope!” cried François, raising himself to his full height in the stirrups, and endeavouring to get a sight of them. But François’ pony did not give him a sufficient elevation to enable him to see the objects; and he was, therefore, compelled to withhold an opinion as to what they might be.

“Should we ride towards them?” asked Lucien, addressing Basil.

“I think they are moving this way,” replied the latter. “They extend more along the horizon, and that may be because they are getting nearer. Buffaloes! no—as I live,” continued he, elevating his voice, “they are horsemen—perhaps mounted Indians!”

“Why do you think so?” inquired Lucien, hurriedly.

“I saw one between me and the sky. I can tell the shape of a horse as far as I can see him. I am sure it was one. Look! yonder goes another!”

“It is,” added Lucien; “it is a horse. But see! there is no rider—no one on his back; and yonder’s another, also without a rider. Ha! I know now—they are mustangs!”

“Mustangs!” echoed François; “good!—that will be something worth seeing.”

It soon proved that Lucien was right. It was a drove of mustangs, or wild horses. Basil was also right in saying that they were coming towards them; for in a few moments they appeared to be within less than a mile, and approaching at a rapid gallop.

They galloped closely together like a trained troop; and one could be perceived some lengths in the advance apparently acting as leader. Now and then one would shy out of the ranks, and rear a moment apart from the rest, but would return again, and fall in with his companions. It was a rare sight to see them as they came on; and the ground thundered under their hoofs as though a squadron of cavalry was charging over it.

When within less than half a mile of the party, they seemed to notice the latter for the first time. All at once the foremost halted, threw up his head with a snort, and stood still. The others stopped, imitating the example of their leader. The latter was still some paces in the advance; while the breasts of his followers seemed to form a compact front, like cavalry in line of battle! After standing still for a few seconds, the leader uttered a shrill neigh, shied to the right, and dashed off at full speed. The others answered the call; and, instantly wheeling into the same direction, followed after. The movement was executed with the precision of a troop!

Our hunters supposed the horses were about to pass them, and part company without coming closer. They all regretted this, as they were desirous of having a nearer view of these noble creatures. In order not to alarm them as they were coming up, all three had taken the precaution to dismount; and now stood partially screened by their own horses, yet holding the latter firmly—as these were terrified by the thundering tramp of the wild steeds.

In a moment the mustangs appeared opposite—that is, with their sides turned to the hunters; and the latter now saw with joy that they were not passing away, but galloping in a circle—of which they, the spectators, were the centre!

The circle in which the horses ran was scarcely half a mile in diameter, and they appeared to be approaching nearer to the centre. In fact, they were not following the circumference of a circle, but a spiral curve that contracted gradually inward.

The boys had now a fair view of them, and a beautiful sight it was. There were about

two hundred in all, but they were of different colours—scarcely two of them being marked alike. There were black and white ones, and bay and roan. Some were brown, some sorrel, and some of an iron-grey; and there were others—many of them—mottled and spotted like hounds! All had flowing manes and long waving tails; and these streamed behind them as they galloped, adding to the gracefulness of their appearance. It was, in truth, a beautiful sight, and the hearts of the boys bounded within them, while their eyes followed the moving troop as it circled round and round.

But the eyes of all three soon centred upon one—the leader, and a fairer object none of them had ever beheld. Basil, who loved a fine horse more than any living thing, was in an ecstasy as he gazed upon this beautiful creature. It was no wonder, for a more perfect-looking animal could hardly have been conceived. He was larger than any of the herd, though still under the size of an English horse. His full chest and prominent eye-balls—his well-bound flanks and quarters—his light cylindrical limbs and small finely-shaped hoofs, showed of what race he was—an Arab of the Andalusian breed—a descendant of the noble steeds that carried the first conquerors of Mexico. His proportions were what a judge would have pronounced perfect; and Basil, who, in fact, was a judge, had already said so. He was white all over—white as the mountain-snow. As he galloped, his nostrils appeared open and red, his eyes stood prominently forth, his mane was tossed on both sides of his neck from his crest to his withers, and his long tail streamed horizontally behind him. His free, graceful movements—like that of all his followers—showed that no saddle had ever been laid across his back.

As Basil gazed upon this noble creature, he became imbued with an irresistible desire to possess him. It is true he already had a horse, and as fine a one as ever wore saddle; but it was Basil’s weakness to covet every fine horse he saw; and this one had inspired him with a most particular longing to become his owner. In a few seconds’ time, so eager had grown this desire, that Basil felt as if he would have

given all he had in the world—Black Hawk, perhaps, excepted—to be the master of this prairie steed. Throwing a lasso, as Basil could, and mounted as he was, it would strike you that he might soon have gratified his wish; but it was not so easy a thing, and Basil knew that. He knew that he might without difficulty overtake and fling his noose over some of the "fags" of the herd; but to capture the leader was quite another thing—a feat never accomplished upon the prairies, even by the Indians themselves. He had often heard this, nevertheless, he was determined to try. He had great confidence in the speed and bottom of Black Hawk.

He communicated his determination to his brothers, in a whisper—lest he might frighten the mustangs, now circling very near. Lucien tried to dissuade him, offering as a reason, that it would lead them from their course, and might separate them from each other.

"No," said Basil. "Go on to the butte, you and François. I shall come to you—perhaps I may be there before you. Do not say a word, brother,—you need not. I must have that horse; and I shall capture him if it cost me a fifty-mile gallop."

While Basil was speaking, he drew closer to his left stirrup, looked to the lasso that hung coiled upon the horn of his saddle, and then stood ready to mount. Lucien saw it was of no use to urge his advice farther, and ceased to interfere. François would fondly have joined Basil in the chase; but his diminutive pony rendered the idea too absurd to be acted upon.

During all this time the wild horses had continued their evolutions. At intervals they would halt at a signal from their leader, and wheel into line, facing inward towards the little group. In this position they would remain for a few seconds, with heads erect, gazing with curious wonder at the strange intruders upon their domain. Some of them would paw the ground, and snort as if in anger. Then the foremost would utter his shrill neigh, and all would go off again, circling about as before.

They had got within less than two hundred yards of where the hunters stood, but it

was evident they intended coming no nearer. On the contrary, they showed symptoms of bearing off. At each fresh movement from a halt, they turned their heads for the prairie, and then came circling back again—as though they had not yet quite satisfied their curiosity.

During their last halt—or what Basil believed might be the last—he again cautioned his brothers to keep on to the butte, and quietly placing his foot in the stirrup, vaulted into the saddle. The movement caused the mustangs to start; but, before they could turn themselves, the young hunter had plied the spur, and made several springs towards them across the prairie. He looked not at the drove—he cared not which way they might go—his eye rested only on the white leader, and towards him he rode in full charge.

The latter, when he saw this sudden movement, stood for a moment, as if in surprise. Then giving a wild neigh—far different from any of the calls he had hitherto uttered—wheeled to the right, and led off in a gallop, the rest following at the top of their speed. As the rearmost came round upon the prairie, Basil was not a dozen yards from them; and in a few springs had got so close that he could easily have thrown his lasso over some of them. In turning, however, he was left far behind; but he soon recovered his distance, and spurred on, bearing slightly to one side of the drove. He did not wish to get in amongst them—as he believed that might be dangerous, and would only impede him. His object was to head the drove, or in some way to separate the leader from the others. This was what he wanted first; and to this task he bent himself with all his energy.

On flew the wild steeds straining themselves to their utmost speed. On followed the hunter,—apparently in reckless pursuit, but carefully guiding his horse as he rode. His lasso hung at his saddle-peak. He had not yet touched it—time enough for that.

On flew the wild horses, and closer followed the daring hunter, until miles of the prairie lay between him and the starting-point. In a few minutes he was no longer

visible to those he had left behind.

But the small Andalusian steeds were no match for the Godolphin Arab. The herd had changed its shape. The horses no longer ran in a body, but in a long string—each taking place according to his speed—and far in advance of all, like a meteor, glanced the snow-white leader.

The hindmost were soon passed—each swerving off from the track, as soon as he saw himself headed by the great dark horse that carried the strange and dreaded object upon his back. One by one they were passed, until Black Hawk had forged ahead of the whole drove; and his rider now saw nothing before him but the white steed, the green prairie, and the blue sky. He looked not back. Had he done so, he would have seen the mustangs scattering in every direction over the plain. But he looked not back. All that he now cared for was before him; and he plied the spur freshly and galloped on.

He had no need to use the spur. Black Hawk seemed to think that his credit rested upon the result, and the faithful brute was doing his best. On the other hand, the wild horse felt that his life, or at least his freedom, depended upon it, and this was enough to urge him to his utmost. Both flew like the wind—pursuer and pursued.

As they parted from the herd, there was not more than three hundred yards between them; and they must have passed over some miles afterwards, before this distance was greatly lessened. Their line of flight was as straight as an arrow; and from this it was evident that the mustang usually trusted to his hoofs to save him from his enemies.

In a race like this, however, the pursuer has the advantage of the pursued. The latter, always anxious, is constrained to look back; and is, therefore, less sure of the ground that lies before. He loses his proper attitude for speed, and is besides in danger of stumbling. So it was with the wild horse. He did not stumble—he was too sure of foot for that—but his head was occasionally thrown to one side, until his large dark

eye commanded a view of his enemy behind him. This, of course, to some extent, retarded him. It was only at these moments that Basil could gain upon him; and the proofs he thus gave of his superior powers, only rendered the latter the more eager to capture and possess him.

After a long chase the distance between them was still two hundred paces at the least. The young hunter, with a feeling of impatience, once more plied the spur in a fresh effort to come up; while the other seemed to spring forward as swiftly as ever.

All at once Basil observed that the white steed, instead of running straight forward, appeared to go from side to side, moving in crooked lines! Basil saw this with surprise. He looked to discover the cause. As his eye glanced along the ground, he perceived that it was uneven—covered, as far as he could see, with little hillocks. The mustang was among them. It was this, then, that was causing him to run so strangely. Basil had hardly made the observation, when he felt his horse sink suddenly under him, and tumble headlong upon the prairie!

The rider was flung from his seat, though not much hurt. He rose at once to his feet. Black Hawk struggled up at the same time, and stood still, his wet flanks rising and falling as he breathed and panted. He was not in a condition to gallop farther. But even had he been fresh, Basil saw that the chase was now at an end. The little hillocks, which he had just noticed, stood thick upon the prairie, as far as the eye could reach; and among these the wild horse was gliding off as swiftly as ever. When the hunter got to his feet again, the other was nearly a quarter of a mile distant, and at that moment sent back a shrill neigh, as if triumphing over his escape—for he had escaped beyond a doubt.

Basil saw this with chagrin. He saw that further pursuit was not only useless, but dangerous; for although he had never seen anything like these little mounds before, he knew very well what they were, and the danger of riding at a rapid rate among them. He had received a timely lesson—for he was just entering their borders when

his horse fell—fortunately to rise again with sound limbs. He knew he might not get off so safely a second time, and he had no inclination to take the chances of another tumble. He was not going to risk the loss of his favourite Black Hawk for the white steed, even had he been certain of capturing the latter. But this was no longer likely. On the contrary, he might, instead of making a capture, lose his own horse, were he to continue the chase; and that he well knew would be a terrible situation. With the best grace he could, therefore, he abandoned the pursuit, leaving the mustang to scamper off alone. He watched him for several minutes, until the latter, far, far away, faded like a white cloud into the pale blue of the horizon.

The young hunter now bethought him of returning to his companions. In what direction was he to go? He looked around for the butte. There it was; but, to his astonishment, it lay directly before him, and nearer than when he last saw it! He had been all this while galloping towards it; but in his haste had not noticed this. Lucien and François must be behind, thought he, and would soon come that way. The best thing he could do, therefore, would be to wait until they should come up; and, with this intention, he sat down upon one of the little hillocks, leaving his horse to wander about at will.

Chapter Twenty Four.

A Dog-Town.

Black Hawk strayed off to some distance in search of grass, for the latter was scanty near the spot; and what there was of it had been eaten as close to the ground, as if a thousand rabbits had been feeding upon it! Basil did not hinder his horse from going. He knew that he was too well trained to run away, and that he could recall him at any moment by a whistle. He sat still, therefore; now scanning the prairie to the eastward, and now endeavouring to kill time by examining the strange little mounds on the other side. Of these there were thousands—indeed, they covered the plain, both to the north and south, and west, as far as Basil could see. They were

shaped like truncated cones, about three feet in diameter at the base, and not over two in height. Near the top of each was the entrance—a hole not much larger than would have been used by a rat. There was no grass immediately around this hole, although the sides and tops of the mounds were clothed with a smooth green turf that gave them the appearance of having been constructed a long time ago.

The inhabitants of these singular dwellings soon began to show themselves. They had been terrified by the thundering tread of the steeds, and had hidden at their approach. All was now silent again, and they thought they might venture abroad. First one little snout peeped out, and then another, and another until every hole had a head and a pair of sparkling eyes looking forth. After a while the owners of the heads became more courageous, and boldly stepped out-of-doors; and then could be seen hundreds of these strange creatures. They were of a reddish-brown colour, with breasts and bellies of a dirty white. Their bodies were about the size of the common grey squirrel; but their general appearance partook of the squirrel, the weasel, and the rat—all three of which they in some respects resembled, and yet were not like any of them. They were a distinct species of animals. They were Marmots, that species known by the fanciful appellation of “prairie-dogs,” (Arctomys ludoviciana). Their tails were very short, and not bushy as those of squirrels; and altogether their bodies had not the graceful symmetry of these animals. In a short time every mound had two or three on its top—for several individuals dwell together in the same house. Some sat upon all fours, while others erected themselves on their hind-feet, and stood up like little bears or monkeys—all the while flourishing their tails and uttering their tiny barking, that sounded like the squeak of a toy-dog. It is from this that they derive the name of “prairie-dogs,” for in nothing else do they resemble the canine species. Like all marmots—and there are many different kinds—they are innocent little creatures, and live upon grass, seeds, and roots. They must eat very little; and indeed it is a puzzle to naturalists how they sustain themselves. Their great “towns” near the Rocky Mountains are generally in barren tracts, where there is but

a scanty herbage; and yet the inhabitants are never found more than half a mile from their dwellings. How, then, do thousands of them subsist on what little grass can grow in a pasture so circumscribed? This has not been explained; nor is it known why they choose these barren tracts for their dwelling-places, in preference to the more fertile prairies. All these things await the study and observation of the historian of nature.

Basil was surprised to observe that the marmots were not alone the occupants of their town. There were other creatures moving about of an entirely different kind, and they also seemed to be perfectly at home. There were white owls, about the size of pigeons, of a species he had never seen before. These were the burrowing owls (Strix cunicularia), differing altogether from their blind cousins of the night who dwell in thick woods and old ruins. He saw these little owls gliding about on silent wing, or standing erect upon the tops of the houses, at a distance looking exactly like the marmots themselves.

Besides the marmots and owls there were other live creatures in sight. There were small lizards scuttling about; and crawling among the mounds was seen a hideous form—also of the lizard kind—the “horned frog” (Agama cornuta). These creatures were new to Basil; and their ugly earth-coloured bodies, their half-toad half-lizard shape, with the thorn like protuberances, upon their back, shoulders, and head, inspired him with disgust as he gazed upon them. He could see, too, the small land-tortoise (Cistuda) squatting upon the ground, and peeping cautiously out of its box-like shell. But there was another creature in this community more fearful than all the rest. This was the ground rattle-snake, which could be seen, coiled up, and basking in the sun, or gliding among the mounds, as if searching for his prey. Basil noticed that it was a different species from any of the rattle-snakes he had seen—differing from them in its shape and markings, but equally vicious in its appearance and habits. It was the Crotalus tergeminus—found only in barren grounds, such as those inhabited by the prairie-marmot.

Basil could not help falling into a train of reflection about this varied community of creatures. Were they friends to each other? or did they form a chain of destruction, preying upon one another? Friends they could not all be. The marmots lived upon grass; and the lizards upon insects and prairie-crickets, of which there were numbers around. Upon these, too, no doubt, the tortoises supported themselves; but upon what fed the owls and snakes?

These questions puzzled Basil. He could not satisfy himself about them; and he thought of Lucien, who understood the habits of these various animals better than himself. He began to think both of Lucien and François—for two hours had now passed, and they did not make their appearance! He was fast becoming uneasy, when a small group of objects was seen approaching from the eastward, which, to his joy, proved to be the party.

In half an hour afterwards they rode up greeting their brother with joyful shouts. They had been travelling briskly ever since the morning, and upon Basil's tracks too, showing what a stretch of ground he must have passed over in his wild gallop. They saw at once that the white horse had got off; and Basil, in a few words, gave them an account of the chase and how it had come to an end.

As it was now afternoon, and the butte still appeared distant, they made but a short halt—just long enough to swallow a morsel of meat and take a drink from their water-gourds, which, owing to the intense heat, were now better than half empty. Their animals already suffered from thirst; so, without delay, the young hunters got into their saddles, with the intention of continuing their journey.

"Across the dog-town?" inquired François, who had mounted first. "Shall we ride through it or go round?"

Here was a difficulty, indeed. The dog-town lay directly between them and the butte. To keep straight forward they would have to ride through it. That would impede them to a considerable extent, as they could only ride slowly and in zig-zag lines

without danger. To go round it, on the other hand, might lead them miles out of the way—perhaps many miles—for these marmot villages are frequently of large extent.

"Let us go south a bit," advised Lucien. "Perhaps we may come to the end of it that way."

They all turned their horses for the south, and commenced riding in that direction.

They rode for at least two miles, keeping along the border of the settlement: but they could still see it ahead, apparently stretching for miles farther.

"We have come the wrong way," said Lucien; "we might have done better had we turned north. We must cross it now; what say you, brothers?"

All agreed to this; for it is not very pleasant to be going about, when the goal of one's journey is within sight. So the heads of the horses were brought round once more facing the butte; and the party rode in among the mounds, and proceeded slowly and with great caution. As they approached, the little "dogs" ran to their hillocks, barked at the intruders, shook their short tails, and then whisked themselves off into their holes. Whenever the party had got past, a hundred yards or so, the marmots would come forth again, and utter their tiny cough-like notes as before; so that, when our travellers were fairly into the "town," they found themselves at all times in the centre of a barking circle!

The owls rose up before them, alighting at short distances; then, once more startled, they would fly farther off, sometimes sailing away until out of sight, and sometimes, like the marmots, hiding themselves within the burrows. The rattle-snakes, too, betook themselves to the burrows, and so did the lizards and agamas. What appeared most strange, was, that all of these creatures—marmots, owls, snakes, lizards, and agamas—were observed, when suddenly escaping, sometimes to enter the same mound! This our travellers witnessed more than once.

Very naturally the conversation turned upon these things; and Lucien added some facts to what Basil had already observed.

"The holes," said he, "had we time to dig them up, would be found to descend perpendicularly for two or three feet. They then run obliquely for several feet farther, and end in a little chamber which is the real house of the marmot. I say the real house, for these cone-like mounds are only the entrances. They have been formed out of the earth brought up from below at the making of the burrows. As you see, this earth has not been allowed to lie in a neglected heap, such as rats and rabbits leave at the mouths of their burrows. On the contrary, it has been built up with great care, and beaten together by the marmots' feet until quite firm and smooth; and the grass has been allowed to grow over it to save it from being washed down by rain. It is evident the animal does all this with design—just as beavers, in building their houses. Now, upon these mounds the marmots love to bask, and amuse themselves in the sun; and it is likely that they can watch their enemies better from this elevated position, and thus gain time to make good their retreat."

"But some of the mounds look quite dilapidated," observed François. "Look yonder, there are several of them caved in, and guttered by the rain! What is the reason, I wonder?"

"These are the ones in which the owls live," replied Lucien. "See! yonder goes an owl into one this very moment! It is supposed that the owls have taken these from the marmots, and use them exclusively for their own dwellings; and, as you perceive, they do not keep them in repair. All they care for is the hole to take shelter in, leaving the outside works to go to ruin as they may. Certain it is that, although we have seen them and the dogs rush into the same hole together, it is because we came suddenly upon them. They do not live thus. The marmots have their own dwellings, and the owls theirs, which last are the ruined ones you have noticed."

"But do not the owls eat the marmots?" inquired Basil. "The great owls of the woods prey upon animals as large. I have seen them kill rabbits in the dusk of the evening."

"These do not," answered the naturalist; "at least it is supposed they do not. Many

that have been shot and opened proved to have nothing in their stomachs but insects and beetles—such as these we see upon the prairie. I think it is probable the owls make an occasional meal of the horned frogs and lizards; though I have no proof of this farther than that birds of this kind usually prey upon such reptiles."

"But how live the rattle-snakes?" inquired François; "what do they feed upon?"

"Ah!" replied Lucien, "that is the puzzle of naturalists. Some assert that they are the tyrants of the community, and devour the old marmots. This can hardly be, as these snakes are not large enough to swallow them, in my opinion. Certain it is, however, that they prey occasionally upon the young, as many of them have been killed with young marmots in their belly?"

"Why, then," rejoined François, "the snakes seem to have it all their own way. If they eat the young marmots, what is to hinder them from killing as many as they please? They can enter the burrows with as much ease as the marmots themselves!"

"That is true," replied Lucien, "but not half so nimbly; and perhaps the latter can even escape them within. The rattle-snake is a very slow crawler; and, besides, only strikes his prey when coiled up. Perhaps, in these subterranean galleries, he is still less able to capture it; and the old marmots may, after all, have some mode of defending both themselves and their young from his venomous attacks. As yet very little is known of these creatures. The remote regions in which they are found place them beyond the observation of naturalists; and such of these, as have visited their towns, have been only allowed time to make a hurried examination of them. They are very shy; rarely letting you get within range of a gun. They are, therefore, seldom shot at. Moreover, it takes great trouble to capture them by digging—on account of the depth of their burrows—and as their skins are not very valuable, and their flesh but a bite at best, they are not often molested by the hunter."

"But are they eatable?" inquired François.

"Yes," answered Lucien; "the Indians are very fond of their flesh, and eat it

whenever they can conveniently get it; but, indeed, they will do the same for almost every living creature."

"What do marmots feed upon in winter, when there is no grass for them?" inquired François.

"They then lie torpid. They have nests in their subterranean chambers, and curious nests these are. They are constructed of grass and roots, are as round as a globe, and so firmly woven together, that one of them might be kicked over the prairie like a foot-ball. The nest is within, with a small hole leading into it, just large enough to admit your finger—for when the marmot goes inside, he closes all up, except this little hole, through which he gets all the air he requires. In these snug beds they lie asleep during the cold season, and at that time are rarely seen outside their burrows."

Chapter Twenty Five.

A Night in the Desert.

Conversing in this way, the young hunters rode on, keeping as far from the edges of the mounds as possible, lest the hoofs of their horses might sink in the excavated ground. They had ridden full five miles, and still the marmot village stretched before them! still the dogs on all sides uttered their "Choo-choo"—still the owls flapped silently up, and the rattle-snakes crawled across their track.

It was near sun-down when they emerged from among the hillocks, and commenced stepping out on the hard, barren plain. Their conversation now assumed a gloomier turn, for their thoughts were gloomy. They had drunk all their water. The heat and dust had made them extremely thirsty; and the water, warmed as it was in their gourd canteens, scarcely gave them any relief. They began to experience the cravings of thirst. The butte still appeared at a great distance—at least ten miles off. What, if on reaching it, they should find no water? This thought, combined with the torture they were already enduring, was enough to fill them with apprehension and

fear.

Basil now felt how inconsiderately they had acted, in not listening to the more prudent suggestions of Lucien; but it was too late for regrets—as is often the case with those who act rashly.

They saw that they must reach the butte as speedily as possible, for the night was coming on. If it should prove a dark night, they would be unable to guide themselves by the eminence, and losing their course might wander all night. Oppressed with this fear, they pushed forward as fast as possible; but their animals, wearied with the long journey and suffering from thirst, could only travel at a lagging pace.

They had ridden about three miles from the dog-town, when, to their consternation, a new object presented itself. The prairie yawned before them, exhibiting one of those vast fissures often met with on the high table-lands of America. It was a barranca, of nearly a thousand feet in depth, sheer down into the earth, although its two edges at the top were scarcely that distance apart from each other! It lay directly across the track of the travellers; and they could trace its course for miles to the right and left, here running for long reaches in a straight line, and there curving or zig-zagging through the prairie. When they arrived upon its brink, they saw at a glance that they could not cross it. It was precipitous on both sides, with dark jutting rocks, which in some places overhung its bed. There was no water in it to gladden their eyes; but, even had there been such, they could not have reached it. Its bottom was dry, and covered with loose boulders of rock that had fallen from above.

This was an interruption which our travellers little expected; and they turned to each other with looks of dismay. For some minutes they deliberated, uncertain how to act. Would they ride along its edge, and endeavour to find a crossing-place? Or would it be better to retrace their steps, and attempt to reach the stream which they had left in the morning? The latter was a fearful alternative, as they knew they could not pass the marmot hillocks in the darkness without losing time and encountering danger. It

is discouraging at all times to go back, particularly as they had ridden so far—they believed that water would be found near the butte. They resolved, at length, to search for a crossing.

With this intention they made a fresh start, and kept along the edge of the barranca. They chose the path that appeared to lead upward—as by so doing they believed they would the sooner reach a point where the chasm was shallower. They rode on for miles; but still the fissure, with its steep cliffs, yawned below them, and no crossing could be found. The sun went down, and the night came on as dark as pitch. They halted. They dared ride no farther. They dared not even go back—lest they might chance upon some outlying angle of the crooked chasm, and ride headlong into it! They dismounted from their horses, and sunk down upon the prairie with feelings almost of despair.

It would be impossible to picture their sufferings throughout that long night. They did not sleep even for a moment. The agonising pangs of thirst as well as the uncertainty of what was before them on the morrow kept them awake. They did not even picket their horses—for there was no grass near the spot where they were—but sat up all night holding their bridles. Their poor horses, like themselves, suffered both from thirst and hunger; and the mule Jeanette occasionally uttered a wild hinnying that was painful to hear.

As soon as day broke they remounted, and continued on along the edge of the barranca. They saw that it still turned in various directions; and, to add to their terror, they now discovered that they could not even retrace the path upon which they had come, without going all the way back on their own tracks. The sun was obscured by clouds, and they knew not in what direction lay the stream they had left—even had they possessed strength enough to have reached it.

They were advancing and discussing whether they should make the attempt, when they came upon a deep buffalo-road that crossed their path. It was beaten with tracks

apparently fresh. They hailed the sight with joyful exclamations—as they believed that it would lead them to a crossing. They hesitated not, but riding boldly into it, followed it downward. As they had anticipated, it wound down to the bottom of the barranca, and passed up to the prairie on the opposite side, where they soon arrived in safety.

This, however, was no termination to their sufferings, which had now grown more acute than ever. The atmosphere felt like an oven; and the light dust, kicked up by their horses' hoofs, enveloped them in a choking cloud, so that at times they could not see the butte for which they were making. It was of no use halting again. To halt was certain death—and they struggled on with fast-waning strength, scarcely able to retain their seats or speak to one another. Thirst had almost deprived them of the power of speech!

It was near sunset, when the travellers, faint, choking, panting for breath, bent down in their saddles, their horses dragging along under them like loaded bees, approached the foot of the eminence. Their eyes were thrown forward in eager glances—glances in which hope and despair were strangely blended.

The grey, rocky bluff, that fronted them, looked parched and forbidding. It seemed to frown inhospitably upon them as they drew near.

"O brothers! should there be no water!"

This exclamation was hardly uttered, when the mule Jeanette, hitherto lagging behind, sprang forward in a gallop, hinnying loudly as she ran. Jeanette, as we have said, was an old prairie traveller, and could scent water as far as a wolf could have done her own carcass. The other animals, seeing her act in this manner, rushed after; and the next moment the little cavalcade passed round a point of rocks, where a green sward gladdened the eyes of all. They saw grass and willows, among whose leaves gurgled the crystal waters of a prairie spring; and in a few seconds' time, both horses and riders were quenching their thirst in its cool current.

Chapter Twenty Six.

The Prong-Horns.

The “butte” was one of those singular formations to be met with in the Great American Desert. It was not a mountain nor yet a hill. Its shape was different from either. It was more like a vast mass of rocky earth, raised above the prairie, perpendicular on all sides, and having a flat level surface upon its top. It was, in fact, one of those hills which in the language of Spanish America, are termed “mesas,” or tables—so called on account of their flat, table-like tops. They are generally argillaceous, and are common upon the Upper Missouri river, and throughout the vast desert regions that lie west of the Del Norte. Sometimes several of them stand near each other upon the plains, looking as though their tops had once been the level of the ancient surface, and the ground between had been worn away by disintegration—from rain and other causes—leaving them thus standing. To the eye of one accustomed to looking only upon rounded hills, or mountains with sharp peaks, these elevated “mesas” appear very singular, and form an interesting study for the geologist.

The top of the one beside which our adventurers halted, had a superficial area of some twenty or thirty acres; and its perpendicular sides rose nearly two hundred feet above the surrounding prairie. A thin growth of pine-trees covered it; while stunted pinons and cedars hung out from its cliffs. There were agaves, and yucca palms, and cacti, growing along its edges, giving it a very picturesque appearance.

Our travellers, after halting, and having satisfied their thirst, of course thought of nothing but remaining there to recruit both themselves and their animals. They saw around them the three requisites of a camp—water, wood, and grass. They commenced by cutting down some pinon-trees that grew by the foot of the cliff. With these a bright fire was soon made. They had still enough bear’s meat left to last them for several days. What more wanted they? But they discovered that even in this

arid region Nature had planted trees and vegetables to sustain life. The pinons afforded their farinaceous cones, the agave yielded its esculent roots, and the prairie-turnip grew upon the borders of the runlet. They saw a small plant with white lily-like flowers. It was the “sego” of the Indians (Calochortus luteus), and they knew that at its roots grew tubers, as large as filberts, and delicious eating when cooked. Lucien recognised all these edible productions; and promised his brothers a luxurious dinner on the morrow. For that night, all three were too much fatigued and sleepy to be nice about their appetites. The juicy bear’s meat, to travellers, thirsty and hungry as they, needed no seasoning to make it palatable. So they washed themselves clear of the dust, ate their frugal meal, and stretched themselves out for a long night’s rest.

And a capital night’s rest they enjoyed—without having been disturbed by anything. One would have supposed that, after so much hardship, they would have got up somewhat wearied. Strange to say, it was not so, for they arose quite refreshed. This Lucien attributed to the bracing influence of the light dry atmosphere; and Lucien was right, for, although an arid soil surrounded them, its climate is one of the healthiest in the world. Many a consumptive person, who has crossed the prairies with flushed cheek, uttering his hectic cough, has returned to his friends to bear joyful testimony to what I now state.

All three felt as brisk as bees, and immediately set about preparing breakfast. They gathered a capful of the pinon cones—the seeds of which Lucien knew how to prepare by parching and pounding. These, with the bear’s meat, gave them a good hunter’s breakfast. They then thought of their dinner, and dug up a quantity of “segos” and prairie-turnips. They found also a mallow—the Malva involucrata—whose long tapering root resembles the parsnip both in taste and appearance. All these were baked with the bear’s meat—so that the dinner, in some respects, resembled ham, turnips, parsnips, and yams—for the root of the sego thus dressed, is not unlike the yam, or sweet potato (Convolvulus batatas).

Of course, our adventurers did not eat their dinner immediately after breakfast. A long interval passed between the two meals, which they employed in washing, scouring, and setting all their tackle to rights—for this had got sadly out of order in the hurry of the previous days. While thus engaged, they occasionally cast their eyes over the prairie, but nothing of the buffalo could be seen. Indeed, they did not look for them very earnestly, as they had made up their minds to stay a day or two where they were—until their animals should be well rested, and ready for rough work again. The latter enjoyed themselves quite as much as their masters. There was plenty of the "grama" grass growing along the banks of the rivulet, and that with the water was all they cared for to make them contented and happy. Jeanette appeared to be glad that she was no longer among the dark woods, where she had so nearly been torn to pieces by panthers and javalies.

Before evening came the boys had finished all the little jobs which had occupied them. Their saddles, bridles, and lassos, were put in thorough repair, and placed upon the dry rocks. Their guns were wiped out, and thoroughly cleaned—lock, stock, and barrel. The horses, too, had been washed by the spring; and Jeanette's shanks had received a fresh "rub" with bear's grease, so that if ever that celebrated article brought out hair upon anything, it was likely to do so for her.

I say, all their little matters having been thus attended to, the young hunters were sitting upon three large stones near the spring, talking over their past adventures and their future prospects. Of course, the buffalo was the principal theme, as that was the object of their expedition. They did not fail to think of their good old father; and they congratulated themselves upon the pleasure he would have in listening to the story of their adventures when they should get back to tell it. Hugot, too, came in for a share of their thoughts; and François laughed over the remembrance of the tricks he had from time to time played upon the little corporal.

While thus enjoying themselves, the eyes of all were attracted to some distant

objects upon the prairie.

“Ho!” exclaimed François, “what a string of wolves!”

Wolves were no unusual sight, and even at that moment several were sitting upon the prairie, not more than two hundred yards from the camp. They were those that had followed the party on their march, having kept along with it for days.

“The animals we see, yonder, are not wolves,” joyfully added Basil. “They are better than that, I fancy—they are deer!”

“No, brother,” rejoined Lucien, “they are antelopes.”

This announcement caused both Basil and François to spring to their guns. Basil was particularly anxious to bring down an antelope, for he had never killed one. In fact, he had never seen one, as this animal is not met with near the Mississippi. Strange to say, its favourite range is the arid deserts that lie near the foots of the Rocky Mountains, where there is but little grass, and less water. In some of these it is the only ruminating animal, of any considerable size, to be met with. It is often found so far from water, that some naturalists have asserted it can live without this necessary element. They forget that what to them appears far from water, is to the antelope but a run of a few minutes, or rather I should say, a flight—for its bounding speed resembles more the flight of a bird than the gallop of a four-footed creature.

Antelopes differ but little from deer. The latter want the gall-bladder, which all antelopes have. Another distinction is found in the horns. The deer’s horns are composed of a solid bony substance, which differs from true horn. The horns of the antelope are more like those of a goat. These are the principal distinctions. In most other respects deer and antelopes are alike. Naturalists say there is but one species of antelope in North America—the prong-horned (Antilope Americana). When the fauna of Mexico has been carefully examined, I think another will be found.

It is only upon the great prairies of the far west that the prong-horned antelope is met with; and there it is a most shy and timid creature, allowing the hunter only to

approach it by cunning and stratagem. A herd is sometimes hunted by the Indians into a “pound,” or “surrounded;” but even then their fleetness often enables them to escape; and so laborious an undertaking is it to capture them thus, that the plan is but seldom adopted, where any other game can be obtained. The easiest mode of taking the antelope is when it is found attempting to cross a river—as its slender limbs and small delicate hoofs render it but a poor swimmer. The Indians sometimes destroy whole herds while thus endeavouring to swim across the great streams of the prairies.

Although so shy, the antelope is as inquisitive as mother Eve was; and will often approach its most dangerous enemy to satisfy its instinct of curiosity. Our party were destined to witness a singular illustration of this peculiarity.

Basil and François had seized their guns, but did not attempt to move from the spot. That would be of no use, they judged; as there was not even a bunch of grass to shelter them in the direction whence the antelopes were approaching. They sat still, therefore, in hopes that the animals were on their way to the spring, and would come nearer of their own accord. In this conjecture the boys were right. The herd, about twenty in all, came on over the prairie, heading directly for the butte. They walked in single file, following their leader like Indians on a war-path! They were soon so near, that the hunters could distinguish every part of their bodies—their yellow backs—their white sides and bellies—the short erect manes upon their necks—their delicate limbs—their long pointed muzzles. They could even perceive the little black spots behind their cheeks, which emit that disagreeable odour—as with the common goat—and on account of which the hunting-trappers, in their unromantic phraseology, have given the name of “goats” to these most graceful animals.

All these peculiarities our young hunters observed as the herd approached. They had placed themselves behind some willow-bushes, so as not to be seen by the latter. They observed, too, that there was but one of them with horns, and that was the

foremost, or leader. All the rest were does or young ones. The antelopes, as they came on, did not appear to regard the horses, that were browsing out upon the plain, though not directly in their way. They took the latter, no doubt, for mustangs—who are not their enemies in any sense—and, therefore, did not fear them.

They arrived at length close to the spring rivulet, where it ran out upon the prairie. They did not approach it to drink. They were evidently advancing towards the spring itself, perhaps with the intention of getting a cooler and more refreshing draught from the fountain-head. The young hunters lay concealed among the willows—each with his gun ready in his hand—determined to fire as soon as the unsuspecting creatures should come within range.

They had got nearly so—within two hundred yards, or less—when all at once the leader was seen to swerve suddenly to the right, and head away from the water! What could this movement mean? On looking in the new direction, several hairy objects were perceived upon the ground. They were odd-looking objects, of a reddish-brown colour, and might have passed for a number of foxes lying asleep. But they were not foxes. They were wolves—prairie-wolves—a sort of animals more cunning even than foxes themselves. They were not asleep neither, though they pretended to be. They were wide awake, as they lay squatted closely upon the grass, with their heads so completely hidden behind their bushy tails, that it would have been impossible to have told what they were, had not the boys known that they were the same wolves they had noticed but the moment before. There were about half-a-dozen of them in all, lying in a line; but so close were they, that their bodies touched one another, and at first sight appeared as one object, or a string of objects connected together. They lay perfectly still and motionless. It was this group that had attracted the leader of the antelope herd, and was drawing him out of his course.

Curious to witness the dénouement, our hunters continued to lie quiet in their ambush among the willows.

The antelopes had all turned in the track of their leader, and were following him in the new direction, like soldiers marching in single file. They went slowly, with outstretched necks and eyes protruded, gazing steadfastly on the strange objects before them. When within a hundred yards or so of the wolves, the leader stopped, and sniffed the air. The others imitated him in every movement. The wind was blowing towards the wolves, therefore the antelopes, who possess the keenest scent, could benefit nothing from this. They moved forward again several paces, and again halted, and uttered their snorts as before, and then once more moved on. These manoeuvres lasted for some minutes; and it was evident that the spirits of fear and curiosity were struggling within the breasts of these creatures. At times the former seemed to have the mastery, for they would tremble, and start as if about to break off in flight. Curiosity would again prevail, and a fresh movement forward was the consequence.

In this way they advanced, until the headmost had got within a few paces of the wolves, who lay all the while as still as mice or as cats waiting for mice. Not any part of them was seen to move, except the long hair of their tails that waved slightly in the breeze; but this only excited the curiosity of the antelopes to a greater degree.

The leader of the herd seemed all at once to grow bolder. He was a stout old buck—what had he to fear? Why should he dread such creatures as these, without heads, or teeth, or claws, and evidently incapable of moving themselves? No doubt they were inanimate objects. He would soon decide that question, by simply stepping up and laying his nose upon one of them.

The Prong-Horns and Prairie Wolves

He was instigated, moreover, by a species of pride or vanity. He wanted to show off his courage before his followers, who were mostly does; many of them his wives too—for the old antelopes are shocking polygamists. It would never do to appear timid in the eyes of the fair does; and he was determined to cut a swagger. Under

this impulse, he walked boldly up, until his sharp snout touched the hair of one of the wolves.

The latter, who had been all the time peeping from under his tail, waiting for just such an opportunity, now sprang to his feet, and launched himself upon the throat of the antelope. His comrades, uncoiling themselves at the same instant, followed his example; and the next moment the prong-horn was dragged to the ground, and worried by the whole pack!

The frightened herd wheeled in their track and scattered right and left. Some ran in the direction of the hunters; but so swiftly did they bound past, that the shots of the latter, aimed in haste, whistled idly over the prairie. Not one of them appeared to have been touched; and, in a few seconds, not one of them was to be seen. They had all escaped, except their leader, who was by this time dying under the teeth of the wolves.

“Well, we shall have him at all events,” said Basil. “Load your guns, brothers! give the wolves time to kill him outright; we can easily run them off.”

“Very kind of them,” added François, “to procure us fresh venison for supper. Indeed we might not have had it but for their cunning. We have done them some service during our journey; it is almost time they should make us a return.”

“We had better make haste, then,” said Lucien, loading at the same time with his brothers; “the wolves appear to be very busy; they may tear our venison to pieces. See! what a scuffle!”

As Lucien said this, the eyes of all were turned upon the wolves. The latter were leaping about over the body of the antelope, now in a thick clump, now more scattered, but all the while apparently worrying the animal to death. Their jaws were already blood-stained, and their bushy tails swept about and above them in ceaseless motion. The hunters made all haste in reloading, lest, as Lucien had suggested, the wolves might spoil the venison. They were not more than a minute engaged in

ramming down the bullets, and fixing the caps on the nipples of their guns. When this was done, all three ran forward together—Marengo in the advance, with outstretched neck and open mouth, eager to do battle with the whole pack.

It was but three hundred yards to the spot where the wolves were; and when our hunters had got within range, all three stopped, levelled their pieces, and fired. The volley took effect. Two were seen kicking and sprawling over the grass, while the others, dropping their prey, scampered off over the prairie. The boys ran up. Marengo leaped upon one of the wounded wolves, while the other was despatched by the butts of their guns. But where was the antelope? There was no such animal to be seen; but, in its stead, half-a-dozen fragments of mangled skin, a horned head and shanks, with a clump of half-picked, ribs and joints! And this was all that was left of the poor prong-horn—all that was left of that beautiful form that, only a few moments before, was bounding over the prairie in the full pride of health, strength, and swiftness!

The boys contemplated his remains with feelings of disappointment and chagrin; for, although there was still plenty of bear-meat, they had anticipated supping upon fresh venison. But neither “haunch” nor “saddle” was left—nothing but torn and useless fragments—so, after sundry sharp ejaculations against the wolves, they left Marengo to make his best of the débris, and, walking back slowly to the camp, seated themselves once more upon the stones.

Chapter Twenty Seven.

Decoying an Antelope.

They had not rested more than five minutes, when their attention was again attracted to the prairie. Another herd of antelopes! Strange to say, it was; and, like the former, these were making directly for the spring. The hunters knew they were not the same; for this herd was much larger, and there were several males in it, easily distinguishable by their forked horns.

The guns were again loaded, and Marengo was called up—lest he might frighten them off.

These, like the others, marched in order, in single file—led by a large buck. There appeared to be about thirty or more in this herd. They had, no doubt, been pasturing all day on some far plain, and were now on their way to the water, determined to have a good drink before going to rest for the night.

When they had arrived within four or five hundred yards of the spring, they turned slightly to the left. This brought them at once to the rivulet—where they entered, and having drunk, went out again, and commenced browsing along the bank. It was evident they did not intend coming any nearer to the butte, or the grove of willows, where our hunters had concealed themselves. This was a disappointment. All three had once more set their minds upon an antelope supper; and now their chances of getting it seemed every moment growing less—as the animals, instead of coming nearer, were browsing away from them over the prairie. There was no cover by which they might be approached. What, then, could the hunters do, but leave them to go as they had come?

But there was an expedient which suggested itself to the mind of Basil. He had heard of it from old hunters; and the curious conduct of the first herd, so lately shown in regard to the wolves, recalled it to his remembrance. He resolved, therefore, to try this expedient, and secure an antelope if possible.

Cautioning his brothers to remain quiet, he took up one of the red blankets that lay near. He had already cut a long forked sapling, and sharpened it at one end with his knife. He now spread out the blanket, holding it up before him; and, with his rifle in one hand, and the sapling in the other, he passed out of the willows into the open ground—keeping the blanket between him and the animals, so that his body was completely hidden from them. In this way he advanced a few paces, walking in a bent attitude, until he had attracted the attention of the antelopes. He then stuck the

sapling firmly in the ground, hung the blanket upon its forks, and knelt down behind it.

An object so odd-looking, both as regarded form and colour, at once excited the curiosity of the herd. They left off feeding, and commenced approaching it—halting at short intervals, and then continuing to advance. They did not move in single file—as the former herd had done—but first one, and then another of the bucks took the lead, each wishing to make a display of his courage. In a few minutes one of the largest was within range; when Basil, who was lying flat along the grass, took sight at the animal's breast and fired.

The buck leaped up at the shot; but, to the great disappointment of the marksman, turned in his tracks, and fled along with the rest of the herd, all of which had bounded off on hearing the crack of the rifle.

Basil beheld this with some surprise. He had taken deliberate aim; and he knew that when he did so, it was seldom that his rifle failed him. He had missed this time, however, as he thought, when he saw the antelope run off apparently unhurt; and, attributing his failure to the hurried manner in which he had loaded his piece, he took up the blanket, and turned with a mortified look towards his companions.

"Look yonder!" cried François, who still watched the retreating antelopes; "look at the wolves! Away they go after."

"Ha!" exclaimed Lucien, "you have wounded the buck, brother, else the wolves would never follow. See! they are running upon his track like hounds!"

Lucien was right. The animal was hit, or the wolves would not have embarked in a chase so hopeless as the pursuit of a prong-horn; for, strange to say, these cunning creatures can tell when game has been wounded better than the hunters themselves, and very often pursue and run it down, when the latter believes it to have escaped! It was evident, therefore, that Basil had hit the animal—though not in a deadly part—and the wolves were now following with the hope of hunting it down.

A new idea came into Basil's mind. He thought he might yet be in at the death; and with this idea he ran up to his horse, drew the picket-pin, and leaping upon his bare back, directed him after the chase. He was soon in full gallop over the prairie, keeping the wolves in sight as he went. He could see the antelope, he had fired at, some distance ahead of the wolves, but far behind the rest of the herd, and evidently running heavily and with pain.

It cost the young hunter a five-mile gallop; and, at the end of that, while he was yet half-a-mile in the rear, he saw the wolves come up with the wounded antelope, and drag it down upon the prairie. He made all the haste he could—putting Black Hawk to the top of his speed. In a few minutes he was upon the ground, and scattered the wolves as he galloped among them; but once more he had arrived too late. The body of the antelope was torn to pieces, and more than half devoured; while only half-picked bones and pieces of skin remained to reward him for his long ride!

With an ejaculation, which came very near being a French oath, the disappointed hunter turned his horse, and rode slowly back—wishing the wolves far enough as he went.

When he returned, François assisted him in his maledictions; for François was tired of the bear-meat, and was vexed at being thus a second time cheated out of something fresh for supper.

Lucien, however, assured them both that the flesh of the antelope, as he had heard, was "no great eating," after all; and this, in some degree, pacified them—so that, with a stew of the jerked bear and parsnips, and some piñon bread, which Lucien had prepared according to the Indian fashion, all three made a supper that was not to be sneered at under any circumstances. When it was eaten, they brought their horses closer to the camp—so as to have them near in case of necessity—and, having wrapped themselves in their blankets, they once more sought the refreshment of sleep.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

Scattering the Cimmarons.

This night they were not permitted to sleep without interruption. Two or three times their horses bounded about at the end of their trail-ropes, frightened by some prowling animal. It might be wolves, thought they; but the dog Marengo, who did not mind the wolves, showed symptoms of terror, growling savagely it intervals, but all the while keeping in by the camp. The mule Jeanette, too, came close up to the fire—as near as her rope would allow her—and our adventurers could see that she trembled, as if in fear of some well-known enemy! Several times they could distinguish, amidst the howling of the wolves, a strange sound, differing altogether from the voices of the latter. It was a kind of continued snort, uttered in a low and querulous tone; and when uttered, it always caused Jeanette to start, and Marengo to crouch closer to them. Could it be the voice of the cougar? or, more fearful thought still, the snort of the grizzly bear? The latter was not unlikely. They were now in a region where these fierce animals are to be met with; and just in such a spot as one or more of them would choose for their abode.

It was a fearful apprehension, and it would have banished sleep from the eyes of the young hunters had they been certain that grizzly bears were in their neighbourhood. They were not certain, however; still they resolved not to sleep all at one time, but to keep watch in turns. The fire was replenished with fresh wood, so that the blaze would enable them to see for a good distance around; and then two of them lay down to sleep again, while the third watched, sitting up with his piece in readiness for any sudden attack. Each took a two-hours' turn as sentinel until the morning broke, which put an end to their fears, as no enemy appeared to be near them.

They now bestirred themselves, let loose their horses upon the grass, performed their ablutions in the crystal water of the spring, and made ready their breakfast. They did not fail to observe, that their stock of the jerked meat could serve them but a day or

two longer; for the wolves at their last camp had carried off a considerable portion of it. They were not without fears as to their future subsistence, as there seemed to be no game in that part of the country except antelopes; and their experience already taught them how little chance they had of capturing these. Should they not fall in with the buffalo, therefore, they might starve with hunger.

These thoughts occupied them while engaged in preparing and eating breakfast; and they resolved to go on half rations of the bear-meat, and economise the little of it that was left.

After breakfast they held a council as to their future route. Should they go north, south, east, or west, from the butte? They were of different minds. At length, however, they all agreed that before coming to any determination, it would be best to climb the butte, and from its top get a view of the surrounding country, which might enable them to resolve upon the best route to be taken. Perhaps they might see the buffaloes from its summit—as it, no doubt, commanded an extensive view of the prairie on all sides.

Shouldering their guns, and leaving their blankets and utensils by the spring, they started on foot to find a place where they might ascend the eminence. They went round by the western end, for their camp was near its north-east side. As they proceeded, they began to fear that there was no place where the hill could be climbed. On all sides it appeared to be a precipice rising perpendicularly from the plain! Here and there loose rocks lay at its base, as if they had fallen from above; and trees grew out of its face, clinging by their roots in the seams of the cliff. Scattered pines standing upon its topmost edge, stretched their branches out over the plain; and the aloe plants, the yuccas, and cacti, added to the wild picturesqueness of its appearance.

On reaching the westernmost point of the butte, a new object presented itself to the eyes of our adventurers. It resembled a range of cliffs, or low mountains, at a great

distance off to the west, and running from north to south as far as they could see. It was, in fact, a range of cliffs—similar to those of the butte. It was the eastern escarpment of the famous “Llano Estacado,” or “Staked Plain.” The boys had often heard hunters speak of this tableland, and they recognised its features at a glance. The butte around which they were travelling was nothing more than an outlying “mesa” of this singular formation of the prairies.

After gazing, for a moment, on the far-off bluffs, our young hunters continued on their course, keeping around the southern side of the eminence. Still the cliffs rose perpendicularly, and offered no slope by which they might be scaled. They appeared even higher on this side; and in some places hung over, with dark jutting rocks, and large trees growing horizontally outward.

At one place the boys had halted, and were gazing upward, when several strange-looking creatures suddenly appeared upon the edge of the precipice above them. They were animals, but such as they had never seen before. Each of them was as large as a common deer, and nearly of the same colour—reddish upon the back and flanks, though the throat, hips, and under parts, were of a whitish hue. They were nearly deer-shaped, though of somewhat stouter proportions, and to these they bore a strong resemblance in many other respects. In the form of their heads and general expression of their faces they resembled sheep more than any other animals. But the most singular part of them was the horns; and these enabled our hunters at a glance to tell what sort of animals they were. They were the “cimmarons,” or wild sheep of the Rocky Mountains.

In regard to their horns, they differed very much from one another; and at first sight there appeared to be two distinct species of animals. Some of them had short horns—not over six inches in length—rising from the crown of the head and bending slightly backward, without widening much between the tips. These were the females of the flock. The males, however, presented an appearance altogether

different, owing to the immense size of their horns. These grew out immediately over their eyes, first curving backwards, and then forwards again, until their points nearly touched the jaws of the animals on both sides. The horns of some were more than a yard in length, and quite half as much in circumference at the base, where they were deeply indented with ring-like grooves and protuberances, such as are seen in those of the common ram. These huge appendages gave the creatures a singular and imposing appearance, as they stood out upon the brink of the precipice outlined against the blue sky. There were about a dozen of them in all—both males and females,—but the males could be more plainly seen, as they were farther forward upon the cliff, looking down and snuffing the tainted air.

As soon as our young hunters had recovered from their first surprise at this novel sight, all three levelled their pieces with the intention of firing. But the cimmarons seemed to have guessed their design; for, as the guns were pointed upward, they wheeled, and were out of sight in a twinkling.

The boys remained on the spot for more than a quarter of an hour, in hopes that the animals would again make their appearance on the precipice above. The latter, however, did not return. They had satisfied their curiosity; or else, wiser than the antelopes, they were not going to let it lure them into danger. Our hunters, therefore, were at length constrained to leave the spot, and continue their search for a path that might lead upward.

They were now more anxious than ever to reach the summit of the butte. There was a flock of wild sheep upon it, and from these they hoped to replenish their larder. As they proceeded, every crevice or ravine that seemed to lead up the cliff was carefully examined; but upon all its southern front no practicable path could be discovered.

“There must be some way up,” said François, “else how could the sheep have got there?”

“Maybe,” suggested Basil, “they were bred up there, and have never been down to

the plain."

"No," said Lucien, "that is not likely, brother. There can be no water, I think, upon the table above; and these animals require drink as well as others. They must descend occasionally to the spring for it."

"Then there is a path," said François.

"No doubt, for them there is," replied Lucien; "but for all that, we may not be able to follow it. These animals, although hoofed as sheep are, can scale a cliff like cats, or spring down one like squirrels. It is in that way they are enabled to escape from wolves, panthers, and other beasts who would prey upon them."

"I have heard," said Basil, "that they can fling themselves down for a hundred feet or more upon their horns, without receiving the slightest injury. Is that true, Luce?"

"Both the Indians and trappers affirm it, and intelligent travellers have believed them. Whether it be true or not is a question among naturalists, that remains to be cleared up. It is certain that they can leap downward for a very great distance—that they can alight on the narrowest shelves of a precipice without a hoof slipping—that they can spring across fearful chasms, and run swiftly along ledges where a dog or a wolf would not dare to venture. Indeed, they seem to delight in such situations—as if it gave them a pleasure to court danger, just as a school-boy likes to luxuriate in perilous feats of agility."

"Are these the same that are called 'big-horns' by the hunters?" demanded François.

"The same," answered Lucien; "'cimmaron' is the name given by the Spaniards—the earliest explorers of these regions. Naturalists have named them 'argali,' from their resemblance to the argali (Ovis ammon), or wild sheep of Europe. They are not the same species, however. In my opinion, they are not wild sheep at all, but true antelopes, as much so as the chamois of the Alps, or the prong-horns of the prairie. Indeed, to say that our common sheep sprung from the argali seems a very absurd theory. There is but little resemblance between the two

animals, except about the head and horns of the rams; and, I think, no circumstances could have caused such a difference as there exists between them in other respects. I should say, then, that the big-horns are not sheep, but antelopes—mountain antelopes, you might call them, to distinguish them from their prong-horned cousins, who prefer to range over the plains, while they, on the contrary, spend most of their time among the steep and craggy cliffs."

An exclamation from Basil, who was walking a few paces in advance, at this moment summoned the attention of his brothers, and put an end to this conversation. They had arrived at the eastern end of the butte, which on that side presented a different appearance from either of the others. There was a deep ravine that indented the cliff, and along its channel a sloping path appeared to lead up to the top. This channel was filled with large loose rocks, surrounded by an underwood of cacti and acacia thorns; and it seemed as though the slope was sufficiently easy to be ascended by a person on foot. Near the bottom of the ravine were very large boulders; and a spring, more copious than the one where the hunters had encamped, ran out from among them, and flowed south-eastward through a fringe of grass and willows.

As the boys came up to the spring branch, some tracks in the soft mud drew their attention. They were of an oblong shape, and larger than the footprints of a man; but the deep holes made by five great claws at the end of each told what animal had made them. They were the tracks of the grizzly bear. There could be no doubt of this, for there were the prints of the long plantigrade feet, the tubercules of the toes, and the holes where the curving claws had sunk several inches into the mud. No other animal could have made such marks—not even the black or brown bear, whose claws are short in comparison with those of the grizzly monster of the mountains.

For some moments our hunters hesitated under feelings of alarm; but, as the animal that had made the tracks was not in sight, their fears gradually subsided to some

extent, and they began to consider what was best to be done. Should they go up the ravine, and endeavour to reach the summit? This would only be carrying out their original intention, and they would have started upward without hesitation, had they not discovered the bear-tracks. Seeing these, however, had put a new aspect on the matter. If there were grizzly bears in the neighbourhood—and this seemed very certain—the ravine was the most likely place to find them in. Its thick underwood, with the numerous crevices that, like caverns, appeared among the rocks on each side, were just such places as grizzly bears delight in. Their lair might be in this very ravine, and it would be a dangerous business to stumble upon it in passing up. But our young hunters were full of courage. They had a keen desire to ascend the butte—partly out of curiosity, and partly to get a shot at the big-horns—and this desire triumphed over prudence. They resolved to carry through what they had begun; and at length commenced to ascend, Basil taking the lead.

It was severe climbing withal; and now and again they had to pull themselves up by laying hold of branches and roots. They noticed that there was a trail, which they followed upward. No doubt the big-horns, or some other animals, had made this trail as they passed up and down—though it was only distinguishable by a slight discoloration upon the rocks, and by the earth being packed firmer in some places, as if by hoofs or feet. A little better than half-way up the boys observed a fissure, like the entrance of a cave, on one side of the ravine and close to the trail. Around this the earthy colour of the rocks, the absence of herbage, and the paddled appearance of the soil, suggested the idea that some animal made its den there. They passed it in silence, climbing as quickly as the nature of the ground would allow them, and looking backwards with fear. In a few minutes they had reached the escarpment of the butte; and, raising themselves by their hands they peeped over, and at once obtained a view of its whole table-like summit.

It was, as they had conjectured, perfectly level upon the top, with an area-surface of about twenty or thirty acres. Pine-trees grew thinly over it, with here and there a

bush or two of acacia, the species known as “mezquite.” There was plenty of grass among the trees, and large tussocks of “bunch grass” mingling with cactus and aloe plants, formed a species of undergrowth. This, however, was only at two or three spots, as for the most part the surface was open, and could be seen at a single view. The hunters had hardly elevated their heads above the cliff, when the herd of big-horns became visible. They were at the moment near the western extremity of the table; and, to the astonishment of all, they appeared leaping over the ground as if they were mad! They were not attempting to escape; for they had not as yet noticed the boys, who, on getting above, had crept cautiously behind some bushes. On the contrary, the animals were skipping about in different directions at the same time, and bounding high into the air. After a moment it was observed that only those with the large horns were taking part in this exercise, while the others were browsing quietly near them. It was soon evident what the males were about. They were engaged in a fierce conflict; and their angry snorts, with the loud cracking of their horns, told that they were in terrible earnest. Now they backed from each other—as rams usually do—and anon they would dash forward until their heads met with a crash, as though the skulls of both had been splintered by the concussion. Sometimes two fought by themselves, and at other times three or four of them would come together, as if it mattered little which was the antagonist. They all appeared to be equally the enemies of one another. Strange to say, the ewes did not seem to trouble themselves about the matter. Most of these were feeding quietly, or if at times they looked up towards their belligerent lords, it was with an air of nonchalance and indifference, as if they cared nothing at all about the result.

Our hunters felt confident that they had the whole flock in a trap. They had only to guard the pass by which they themselves had come up, and then hunt the big-horns over the table at their leisure. It was agreed, therefore, that Lucien with Marengo should remain there, while Basil and François stole up for a first shot. They lost no time in putting this plan into execution. They perceived that the fight completely

occupied the attention of the animals; and, taking advantage of this, Basil and François crept over the ground—sheltering themselves, as well as they could—until they had got within easy range. Both arrived together behind a little clump of acacias; and, by a signal from Basil, they raised themselves together to take aim. As they did so, they saw one of the rams, who had been backing himself for a rush, suddenly disappear over the edge of the cliff! They thought he had tumbled over—as his legs were the last of him they had seen—but they had no time to speculate upon the matter, as both pulled trigger at the moment. Two of the animals were laid prostrate by their fire; while the rest bounded off, ran out to a point of the table, and there halted.

Basil and François leaped to their feet, shouting for Lucien to be on the alert: but, to their great surprise, the cimmarons, as if newly terrified by their shouts, and finding their retreat cut off, sprang over the precipice, disappearing instantly from view!

"They must be all killed," thought Basil and François; and, calling Lucien to come up, all three ran to the point where the animals had leaped off, and looked over. They could see the plain below, but no big-horns! What had become of them?

"Yonder!" cried François; "yonder they go!" and he pointed far out upon the prairie where several reddish-looking objects were seen flying like the wind toward the far bluffs of the Llano Estacado. Lucien now directed the eyes of his brothers to several ledge-like steps upon the cliff, which, no doubt, the animals had made use of in their descent, and had thus been enabled to reach the bottom in safety.

As soon as the cimmarons were out of sight, the hunters turned towards the two that had been shot—both of which, a male and female, lay stretched upon the grass and quite dead. The boys were about to commence skinning them, when Basil and François remembered what they had observed just before firing; and, curious to convince themselves whether the big-horn had actually tumbled over the cliff by accident or leaped off by design, they walked forward to the spot. On looking over

the edge, they saw a tree shaking violently below them, and among its branches a large red body was visible. It was the cimmaron; and, to their astonishment, they perceived that he was hanging suspended by one of his huge horns, while his body and legs, kicking and struggling, hung out at their full length in the empty air! It was evident he had tumbled from the top contrary to his intentions; and had been caught accidentally in the branches of the pine. It was a painful sight to witness the efforts of the poor creature; but there was no means of getting him off the tree, as he was far beyond their reach; and Basil, having loaded his rifle, in order to put an end to his agony, sent a bullet through his heart. The shot did not alter his position—as the horn still held on to the branch—but the animal ceased struggling and hung down dead,—to remain there, doubtless, until some hungry vulture should espy him from afar, and, swooping down, strip the flesh from his swinging carcass!

Chapter Twenty Nine.

Besieged by Grizzly Bears.

The young hunters now laid aside their guns, drew their knives, and skinned the cimmarons with the dexterity of practised “killers.” They then cut up the meat, so as the more conveniently to transport it to their camp. The skins they did not care for; so these were suffered to remain on the ground where they had been thrown.

As soon as the “mutton” was quartered, each shouldered a piece, and commenced carrying it toward the ravine, intending to return and bring the rest at another load or two. On reaching the point where the path came up on the table, they saw that it would be difficult for them to descend with their burdens—as it is more easy to climb a precipice than to get down one. Another plan suggested itself; and that was, to pitch the pieces down before them to the bottom of the ravine. This they could accomplish without difficulty. It would do the meat no harm—as they intended to cut it up for jerking—and they could easily wash out the dirt and gravel at the spring, when they had got it all there.

This plan was at once adopted; and, taking up piece by piece they flung them down the chasm, and could see them lying among the rocks at the bottom. They then went back to the carcasses, took up fresh loads, and returned with them to the ravine.

As they stepped forward to fling them over, a sight met their eyes that caused each one to drop his load upon the spot. Down near the bottom of the ravine, and moving among the pieces of meat, was a hideous object—a huge and ill-shaped animal. Its great size—its long shaggy hair and greyish brown colour—but, above all, its fierce aspect, left no doubt upon the minds of our hunters as to what sort of animal it was. There was no mistaking the dreaded monster of the mountains—the grizzly bear!

It was nearly twice the size of the common bear; and it differed from the latter in other respects. Its ears were more erect; its eyes, of burnt sienna colour, looked more fiery and glaring; its head and muzzle were broader—giving it an appearance of greater boldness and strength—and its long crescent-shaped claws, protruding from the shaggy covering of its feet, could be distinctly seen from the top of the cliff. With these it had just torn one of the pieces of mutton into smaller fragments, and was eagerly devouring it as the boys arrived on the height above. It was so busily engaged that it did not notice them.

All three, as we have said, dropped their loads on the ground; and, after pausing for a moment to look down, ran precipitately back for their guns. These they got hold of, and examined with care, looking to their caps and nipples. They had already loaded them, before commencing to skin the cimmarons. They now stole cautiously back to the ravine, and again looked over its edge. To their consternation, not one bear, but three of these horrid animals were busy with the meat below! One was smaller than either of the others, and differed from them in colour. It was quite black; and might have passed for a full-grown bear of the black species. It was not that, however; but a large cub, of which the other two were the parents.

All three were tearing away at the fresh meat, evidently in high glee, and not caring

to consider whence such a windfall had come, so long as they were getting the benefit of it. They occasionally uttered loud snorts—as if to express their gratification—and at intervals the old male one growled as the cub interfered with his eating. The female, on the contrary, as she tore the mutton into fragments, kept placing the daintiest morsels before the snout of her black progeny; and with playful strokes of her paw admonished it from time to time to fall to and eat. Sometimes they ate standing erect, and holding the meat between their fore-paws. At others they would place the piece upon a rock, and devour it at their leisure. Their jaws and claws were red with the blood—that still remained in the hastily-butchered meat—and this added to the ferocious aspect of the trio.

Our adventurers gazed down upon the scene with feelings of the utmost terror; and no wonder. They had heard such stories of the grizzly bear, as would have inspired stouter hearts than theirs with feelings of the kind. They knew that no hunter, when dismounted, ever dares to attack this animal; and, even when on horseback and armed with his trusty rifle, he will only venture to do so when the ground is open, and he is sure of escape through the fleetness of his horse. They knew that hunters, even when in large parties, are often chased by a single bear of this kind, after each of them had given him a shot; for as many as twenty bullets have been fired into the body of a grizzly bear without bringing him to the ground. All these facts came into the minds of our boy hunters at the moment. No wonder they felt fear.

They were in a most perilous situation. The bears occupied the ravine. There was no other path by which they could get down to their horses. They had gone almost quite round the butte in their morning search. They had seen that it was precipitous on all sides, and they had since observed that the space between the ravine and their point of starting was the same. How, then, were they to get back to camp? There was no way but one—down the ravine—and the bears would be certain to attack them should they attempt to descend that way.

The boys gazed at each other with terrified looks, repeating what they had to say in muttered whispers. All three well understood the danger of their position. Would the bears, after they had satisfied their hunger, go off and leave the ravine? No. The cave, which had been noticed, was their lair, beyond a doubt. Even if they should enter it, what certainty was there that they would not rush out upon the boys as they were clambering down? If so, they would easily overcome the latter among the loose rocks and bushes. One or all would fall a sacrifice should they attempt to descend. Might the bears not go out upon the plain? Perhaps they might go out as far as the spring, either for water, or led by some other want. But even so, they would then be able to see the hunters coming down, and could easily overtake them before the latter could reach the camp, or their horses. The horses had been set loose, and were now a good distance off upon the prairie. There was but little consolation in this thought, and less in that which occurred to them next; which was that the fierce brutes might not be satisfied at what they had eaten, but might take it into their heads to clamber up to the summit in search of more! This apprehension was the most fearful of all—as the boys knew that there was no place upon the table where they could long conceal themselves; and to get down, if once discovered and pursued, would be utterly impossible.

Filled with these appalling thoughts, they crouched upon their hands and knees, now peering cautiously through the leaves of the aloes, and now whispering to each other the various plans of escape that suggested themselves. But all these plans ended in the faint hope that the bears might make a temporary absence from the ravine, and give them a chance to pass down. They could think of no other mode of extricating themselves from their dilemma.

At times the idea occurred to Basil, of taking good aim, and firing at one or other of the huge animals. François applauded this idea, while Lucien as strongly opposed it. The latter argued that it would only irritate the bears, and bring them up at once—that there was no chance of killing any of them by a single bullet, unless it

passed through the brain or the heart; and this, aiming, as they must do, over a cliff, was a very problematical affair. Even should one fall, the others would avenge the death of their comrade. A volley would not be likely to kill them all.

Lucien's arguments prevailed; and the less prudent brothers gave up their idea of firing, and remained, silently gazing down as before.

They lay for nearly half-an-hour watching and waiting. The bears finished their meal, having devoured every bit of the meat. Were they satisfied? No. A shoulder of mutton is but a morsel to the ravenous appetite of a grizzly bear; and it seemed only to have set theirs upon edge. They guessed whence their lunch had come—from above—and there was the place to go in search of their dinner. They looked up. The boys suddenly drew back their heads, hiding them behind the leaves. It was too late. The bears had seen them, and the next moment were galloping upward!

The first thought of our hunters was to fly, and with this intention they all sprang to their feet. But Basil, with a feeling of rage, was determined to try whether a rifle-bullet might not serve as a check to the advancing enemy. He levelled down the pass, and fired. His brothers, seeing him do so, followed his example—François emptying both barrels that had been loaded with buck-shot. One of the bears—the cub it was—tumbled back down the ravine but after the volley the largest of all was seen clambering up, growling fiercely as he came. The hunters, not having time to reload, ran off over the table—scarcely knowing what direction to take.

When they had got half-way across it, all three stopped and looked back. The foremost bear was just rising above the cliff; and the next moment his long body was stretched out in pursuit of them. They had been in hopes that the pieces of meat might have attracted his attention, and drawn him aside. This did not happen. The meat was not directly upon his path; moreover, the animal appeared infuriated as he approached. He had been stung by the shot, and was bent upon revenge.

It was a terrible moment. The angry monster was within three hundred yards of

them. In a few seconds he would be upon them, and one or the other must become his victim.

In crises like these, bold minds are the most apt to conceive expedients. So it was with that of Basil. On other occasions he was rash and often imprudent, but in moments of extreme danger he became cool and collected, even more so than his philosophic brother, Lucien. A thought, which hitherto had strangely been overlooked both by himself and his brothers, now in the hour of peril came into his mind. He remembered that the grizzly bear is not a tree-climber! With the thought he shouted out,—

"To the trees! to the trees!" at the same time embracing one of the pines, and sprawling upwards as fast as he could climb.

Both Lucien and François imitated his example, each taking to the tree that grew nearest him—for the bear was not twenty paces behind them, and there was no time to pick and choose. Before the latter could come up, however, all three were perched in the pines, as high among the branches as they could safely get.

The bear galloped forward, and seeing where they had gone, ran from tree to tree, growling with rage and disappointment. He rose upon his hind-legs, and endeavoured to reach the lowermost branches with his fore-paws—as if he intended to draw himself up, or drag the tree down. One by one he assailed the pines, shaking them with violence, and with his claws making the bark fly off in large pieces. One in particular—that upon which François had taken refuge—being a small tree, vibrated so rapidly under the powerful efforts of the brute, that its occupant was in danger of being dashed to the ground. But the fear of such an event caused François to put forth all his energies; and, encouraged by the shouts of Basil and Lucien, he held on manfully. The bear, after a while, seeing he could not shake him off, gave it up; and again tried his strength upon the trees that had been climbed by the others. This ended as before; except that the bear completely skinned off the bark as high as

he could reach, and made such an impression upon the trunks with his teeth and claws, that the boys feared he might take it into his head to cut down the trees altogether. He could easily have accomplished this; but, fortunately for them, the grizzly bear is not gifted with reasoning faculties, else their fate would have been a terrible one indeed.

When he found, at length, that he could neither drag down the trees, nor shake the boys out of them, he gave up the attempt; and for a time walked from one to the other, backwards and forwards, like a sentry, now and then uttering a loud “sniff,” and at intervals growling fiercely. At length he stretched his huge body along the ground, and appeared to sleep!

What had become of the female and the cub? Had both fallen by the shots fired at them? Neither had as yet made their appearance on the summit—for the boys from their perch could see every inch of its surface. They were still in the ravine then; but whether dead or alive could not be determined. The dog Marengo, by a wise instinct, had not attacked the bear, but had escaped to one edge of the table, where he was crouching and cowering with fear, taking care not to put himself in the way of being seen.

The young hunters were now in a worse situation than ever. They dared not venture out of the trees without the certainty of dropping into the jaws of the monster; and they were suffering pain as they sat straddled across the slender branches of the pines. Besides, they were thirsty—thirsty to an extreme degree. They had taken no water with them in the morning. The sun was fiercely hot; and, even while engaged in skinning the big-horns, they had been complaining for want of water. They now began to suffer from thirst, more than from any other cause. Should the bear remain for any length of time, what would become of them? They must either drop down to be at once torn to pieces, or perish slowly where they sat. These were the alternatives!

Basil and the Grizzly Bear

They could make no change in their situation. Their guns were upon the ground, where in their haste they had flung them. They dared not descend to recover them. They were utterly helpless; and could do nothing but await the result. As if to tantalise them, they now beheld for the first time the objects of their far expedition—the animals they had so long desired to come up with—the buffaloes! Away to the south-west a multitude of black bodies were seen upon the plain, like crowds of men in dark clothing. They were moving to and fro, now uniting in masses, and now separating like the squadrons of an irregular army. Miles of the green prairie were mottled by their huge dark forms, or hidden altogether from the view. They seemed to be moving northward, along the level meadows that stretched between the butte and the Llano Estacado. This proved to be the case; for in a few minutes the headmost had pushed forward on a line with the butte; and our young hunters could distinguish the shaggy, lion-shaped bodies of the bulls that formed the vanguard of the "gang." Under other circumstances this would have been a glad sight indeed. As it was, it only served to render their situation more intolerable. The buffaloes were passing to the north. Even should they themselves escape, after a time they might not be able to overtake them; and although they could distinguish none that were white—for the main body was a great way off—it was highly probable that in so large a herd one or more of these would be found.

As all three continued to watch the black multitudes rolling past, an exclamation, or rather a shout of joy, was uttered by Basil. He was upon a tree that stood apart from the others and gave him an unobstructed view of the plains to the west.

"Voilà! yonder! yonder!" he cried: "see! in the middle of the drove! See, brothers!—it shines in the sun—white—white! Huzza!—huzza!"

Basil's speech was scarcely coherent. Neither was that of his brothers, when they beheld the object to which he had alluded. It could be nothing else, all believed, than

the object of their long wild hunt—a white buffalo. All three huzzaed loudly, and for a moment forgot the peril of their position. Their shouts started the grizzly monster below, who, lazily rising to his feet, once more commenced growling and shuffling about among the trees. The sight of him soon restored the hunters to a sense of the fearful realities that surrounded them.

Chapter Thirty.

An Escape from the Bear-Scrape.

For hours they sat upon their painful perch—now glancing downward at the fierce gaoler that watched unweariedly below—now gazing out upon the plain, where the dusky droves still continued to move. For hours the buffaloes kept passing northward, until the setting sun glanced redly from their brown bodies. Once or twice again the boys thought they saw white ones in the herd; but their eyes had grown dim with watching, and the pain which they endured now rendered them indifferent to aught else than their own misery. Despair had conquered hope—for they were choking with thirst—and death stared them in the face.

After a long while the bear again lay down, and placing his fore-paws over his head appeared once more to sleep. Basil could stand it no longer; and now resolved to make an effort to escape. At all events he would try to bring about some change in their painful situation.

Cautioning his brothers to remain silent, he slipped down from his tree; and, with the stealthy tread of a cat, crept over the ground in search of his rifle. He soon laid hands upon it; and then, returning to his tree, climbed up again. The shaking of the branches as he did so, awoke the bear; who sprang to his feet, and rushed towards the tree. Had he been a moment sooner, it would have been ill for Basil, for the snout of the animal, as he reared upward against the trunk, almost touched the boy's feet. It was an "inch of a miss as good as a mile," and Basil was saved. The next moment he was seated among the branches, and leisurely loading his rifle!

Strange to say, the bear appeared to comprehend this movement. As if aware of his danger, he kept out farther from the trees; and, while rambling about, now, for the first time, stumbled upon what remained of the carcasses of the big-horns. These he proceeded to tear up, and devour. He was still within range of the rifle, though not for a sure shot; but Basil, who knew he could load again, was determined either to force him farther off, or bring him within reach; and with this intent he took aim and fired. The bullet hit the bear in the fore-shoulder, for he was seen to turn his head and tear at the spot with his teeth, all the while growling with rage and pain. Strange to say, he still continued to devour the meat!

Again Basil loaded and fired as before. This time the animal received the shot about the head, which caused him to make fresh demonstrations of his fury. He dropped his prey, and galloped back among the trees, first clutching one and then another, making repeated efforts to drag them down. He at length came to Basil's tree, and seized it in his fierce hug. This was exactly what the young hunter wanted. He had hastily reloaded, and as the bear stood upright under the branches, he leant downwards until the muzzle of his rifle almost touched the snout of the animal. Then came the report—a stream of fire was poured into the very face of the bear—and a crashing sound followed. As the smoke cleared off, the huge body was seen kicking and sprawling upon the ground. The leaden messenger had done its work. It had passed through the brain; and in a few seconds the shaggy monster lay motionless upon the earth.

The boys now dropped from the trees. François and Lucien ran for their guns, and all three having loaded with care, proceeded toward the ravine. They stayed not to examine the enemy that had been slain. Thirst urged them on, and they thought only of getting to the spring below. They were full of hope that the she-bear and her cub had been killed by their first fire, and that they would now find the road clear.

What was their disappointment when, on looking down the ravine, they saw the cub

lying doubled up, near the bottom, and the old one standing sentry over it! The cub was evidently dead. So much the worse—as the mother would not now leave it for a moment, and both were directly in the path. The latter was moving backward and forward upon a ledge of rock, at intervals approaching the cub and tossing its body with her snout, and then uttering a low querulous moan, that was painful to listen to!

The hunters saw at once that their situation was as bad as ever. Their retreat was cut off by the infuriated mother, who might remain where she was for an indefinite time. Should they fire down upon her, and take the chances of once more escaping to the trees? This was an alternative which they had reason to dread. Their painful experience decided them against it. What then? Remain until after night-fall, and try to steal past in the darkness? Perhaps the bear might retire to her cave, and give them an opportunity to do so. But in the meantime they were dying of thirst!

At this moment a happy idea suggested itself to Lucien. He saw the cactus plants growing near. There were large globes of the echinocactus. He remembered having read that these often assuaged the thirst of the desert traveller. The plants were soon reached, and their succulent masses laid open by the knives of the hunters. The cool watery fibres were applied to their lips; and in a few minutes their thirst was alleviated and almost forgotten. Still the bear occupied the ravine, and so long as she remained there, there was no possible chance of their getting back to camp. They saw, however, that they could do nothing better than wait for the night, in hopes that the darkness might bring about something in their favour.

Night soon came on, but not darkness. It chanced to be a clear moonlight; and they saw at once that it would then be quite as perilous to go down the ravine as it had been during the day. They could hear the snorting and growling of the monster below; and they knew she still held the pass. Should they attempt to descend, she would discover them long before they could get down. She could hear them clambering among the rocks and bushes. The advantage would be hers, as she could

attack them unawares. Besides, even had the coast been quite clear, they would have found it difficult to get down the steep descent in the night. They dared not attempt it. After much deliberation, therefore, they resolved to wait for the morning.

Throughout all the live-long night they kept awake. They heard their steeds neighing below—wondering, poor brutes, what had become of their masters. The hinny of Jeanette echoed wildly from the cliffs, and was answered by the bark and howl of the prairie-wolf. These sounds, together with the more ominous snort of the bear, kept sleep from the eyes of our adventurers. They dared not go to sleep, unless by perching themselves in the trees; as they knew not the moment the bear might come up to the summit. Sleeping upon the slender branch of a mountain pine is more painful than pleasant; and all three preferred keeping awake.

Morning broke at length. The first light showed that the shaggy sentinel was still at her post. She sat upon the same spot, as though she was guarding her dead offspring. The young hunters, but particularly Basil, began to grow impatient. They were hungry, though there were still left some fragments of the wild mutton, which they could have eaten. But they were thirsty as well. The juice of the cactus allayed, but did not quench, their thirst. They longed for a draught of cool water from the spring below. The buffaloes, too, were gone northward, “on the run.” They might never overtake them. They might never again have such an opportunity of procuring that for which they had endured all this suffering. These thoughts influenced all three, but Basil more than any. Some attempt must be made to reach the plain, and escape from their elevated prison.

Basil proposed provoking the bear, by firing upon her. She would pursue them, he urged, as the other had done, and meet with a similar fate. This might have succeeded, but it would have been a dangerous experiment. Lucien suggested that two of them should go round the edge of the precipice and examine it more carefully, while the third kept a watch upon the bear. Perhaps there might yet be

found some other path that led to the plain. This offered but a faint hope; still it would take only a few minutes to make the examination, and Lucien's proposal was therefore agreed to.

"If we only had a rope," suggested François, "we could let ourselves over the cliff, and then the old grizzly might stay there for ever, if she pleased."

"Ha!" shouted Basil, as if some plan had suddenly come into his mind, "what dunces we have been! Why did we not think of it before? Come, brothers! I'll get you down in the twinkling of an eye—come!"

As Basil uttered these words, he strode off towards the spot where they had butchered the big-horns. On reaching it he drew his hunting-knife; and having spread out one of the skins, proceeded to cut it into strips. Lucien, at once guessing his design, assisted him in the operation; while François was sent back to the head of the ravine, in order to watch the bear.

In a few minutes the brothers had cut up both of the hides, until the ground was covered with long strips. These they knotted firmly together—placing cross-pieces of pine branches in the knots—until they had made a raw-hide rope over one hundred feet in length!

They now proceeded to a convenient point of the cliff—where a pine-tree grew near its edge—and tied one end of the new-made rope around the trunk. To the other end they fastened Marengo, the three guns—for François had arrived upon the ground—and, along with these, a large stone—in order to test the strength of the rope before any of themselves should venture upon it. All these things were now lowered down until they could see them resting upon the prairie below.

The rope was next made taut above; and the weight of the stone—which was too heavy for Marengo to move—kept all fast below. François slipped down the rope first. There was but little difficulty in his doing so; as the pieces of wood formed rests, or steps, that prevented him from sliding too fast. Lucien followed next, and

then Basil; so that in less than half an hour, from the time that this plan of escape had occurred to them, all three found themselves safe upon the level of the prairie!

They did not waste time when they had got there. Marengo was released, and the whole party hurried in the direction of their horses. These were soon reached, caught, and saddled; and our hunters, now that they could mount at any moment they pleased, felt themselves safe.

They resolved, however, to remain no longer by the butte, but to ride away from it, as soon as they had eaten a morsel. A small fire was, therefore, kindled; and a piece of bear-meat, hastily broiled, satisfied their hunger. Basil would have gone back on horseback, to attack the old she-bear in the ravine; but the more prudent Lucien dissuaded him; and, holding their horses in readiness, they packed their camp equipments upon Jeanette, and once more took the route.

Chapter Thirty One.

The Vultures and their King.

They turned their horses' heads westward. It was their intention to travel in that direction, until they should strike the tracks of the buffaloes, when they would turn to the north, follow upon the trail of these animals, and endeavour to come up with the great herd. This was clearly the best course they could adopt.

As they were riding past the western extremity of the butte, a flock of large birds drew their attention. They were vultures. The boys now remembered the cimmaron that had fallen over the cliff; and, looking up, they beheld its body still swinging from the tree. It was that which had attracted the vultures.

There were many of them—over an hundred in the flock. Some were sailing about in the air. Others had alighted on the top of the cliff, or perched themselves on the branches of the pines, while a few hovered around the carcass, occasionally settling a moment upon its stiffened limbs, and endeavouring to penetrate the hide with their

beaks. They had already torn out the eyes of the animal, but the tough skin of the body still resisted their attacks.

These birds were larger than ravens, and of a dark colour—nearly black. At a distance they appeared purely black; but, upon a nearer view, an admixture of brownish feathers could be perceived, and this was apparent in some of them more than in others. To a careless observer they would all have passed for birds of the same species, although that was not the case. There were two distinct species of them, the "turkey-buzzard" (Cathartes aura), and the black vulture (Cathartes atratus). Our boys knew them well enough—for both kinds are common in Louisiana, and throughout all the southern part of the United States.

I have said that a careless observer would mistake the one species for the other. They are nearly of the same size and colour, though the carrion-crow is of a deeper black than the buzzard; but there are other points of difference that would strike the eye of a naturalist at once. The buzzard is a much more handsomely formed bird, and is more graceful, both upon the ground and while sailing through the air. His wings are longer and more elegantly plumed, and his tail is more tapering. The skin of his naked head and neck, as well as that of his legs, is of a reddish or flesh colour; while the same parts of the black vulture are a mixture of black and grey—the black being caused by a down that grows thinly over the skin. They are easily distinguished in the air. The black vulture flies rather heavily—flapping his wings several times with a quick repetition, and then holding them horizontally for a hundred yards or so—while his short ill-proportioned tail is spread out like a fan. The buzzard, on the contrary, holds his wings at rest—not in a horizontal position, but bent considerably upward. In this attitude he will skim along for a quarter of a mile, without a single stroke of his wings, and that, too, not downward as may be supposed, but along a level, or a line often curving upward! How he executes this upward movement is not known. Some suppose that he possesses the power of inflating himself with heated air, which enables him to soar upward without using

his wings. This theory is not very clear, and requires demonstration before it can be accepted as the true one. Others say that he is carried up by the impetus he has already obtained, by having previously descended from an equal or greater height. This is not true, however, as the buzzard may be often seen to rise in this way after a long flight along the level line. It is just possible that the same principle by which the New Holland savages direct their boomerangs, or by which flat stones thrown horizontally often take an upward direction—a fact known to every boy—I say it is just possible that this principle, as yet but little understood, may be instructively acted on by the buzzard, and have something to do with his flight. Be the facts as they may, it is an interesting sight to watch one of these birds, with broad wings outlined against the blue background of the heavens, now swimming in circles, now shooting off in horizontal lines, and anon soaring upward or tracing the undulating curves of the ogee. It is, to say the least of it, a striking and beautiful sight.

The turkey-buzzard is, upon the whole, a nobler bird than the black vulture. There is more of the eagle about him. Both, it is true, are carrion-feeders, like all vultures; but the buzzard also hunts after other food, such as snakes, lizards, and small quadrupeds. He will attack young lambs or pigs, when a good opportunity offers. So, too, will the black vulture, but not so frequently. Neither of them, however, do much harm in this respect; and their preying on such animals is an exception, and not a rule. They only do so, probably, when driven to it by hunger. Both species are gregarious, although they do not always appear in flocks. The buzzards, particularly, are often seen hunting alone, or in twos or threes; but their mode of life brings them together in large numbers. They often assemble—both buzzards and black vultures—to the number of hundreds, over a single carrion. The buzzards, however, are not so plenty as the black vultures; and in one of these flocks more than three-fourths will be found of the latter species. The buzzards are the shyer birds; and they are less disposed to keep together in flocks. It has even been said that these are not gregarious, as they are often seen alone in the high regions of the air. But it is

certain that not only do numbers of them roost together at night, but they even associate with the black vultures at such times.

In most countries the vulture is a privileged bird. He is looked upon as a cheap and useful scavenger, clearing away the carcasses of dead animals, that would otherwise pollute the atmosphere. This is a matter of much importance in hot countries; and it is only in such countries that vultures are commonly found. What a beautiful illustration of the completeness of Nature's laws! As you get into high latitudes and colder regions—where the air is not so readily tainted by putrid substances—the necessity for such a scavenger no longer exists, and he is rarely met with. There the great vulture gives place to the croaking raven, and the small carrion-crow.

Vultures, I have said, are privileged birds. In most countries they are protected by law. This is the case with regard to the present species, both in English and Spanish America, where there is a fine for killing them. The consequence is, they are seldom molested; and in many places are so tame, that they will permit you to come within a few feet of them. In the cities and villages of the Southern States they alight in the streets, and go to sleep upon the house-tops. They do the same in the cities of Mexico and South America, where both species are also found.

As soon as our young hunters had got opposite the cliff where the vultures were, they reined up, determined to remain awhile, and watch the manoeuvres of the birds. They were curious to see how the latter would conduct themselves with a prey so singularly situated, as was the carcass of the cimmaron. They did not dismount, but sat in their saddles, about an hundred yards from the cliff. The vultures, of course, did not regard their presence; but continued to alight, both upon the escarpment of the precipice and upon the loose rocks at its foot, as if no one was near.

"How very like the buzzards are to hen turkeys!" remarked François.

"Yes," rejoined Lucien, "that is the reason why they are called 'turkey-buzzards.'"

François' observation was a very natural one. There are no two birds, not absolutely

of the same species, that are more like each other than a turkey-buzzard and a small-sized turkey-hen—that is, the common domestic turkey of the black variety, which, like the buzzard, is usually of a brownish colour. So like are they, that, at the distance of a hundred yards, I have often taken the one for the other. This resemblance, however, extends no farther than to the general appearance—the shape and colour. In most other respects they differ, as you may imagine, very materially.

“Talking of turkey-buzzards,” continued Lucien, “reminds me of an anecdote that is told in relation to one.”

“Oh! let us have it, brother,” said François.

“With pleasure,” replied Lucien. “It is intended to illustrate the superior cunning of the white over the Indian race; and is a pretty fair sample of the honesty and justice which the former has too often observed in its dealings with the latter. It is as follows:—

“A white man and an Indian went out together for a day’s hunting. They agreed that the game should be equally divided at night, no matter who had killed the largest share of it. During the day the Indian shot a turkey, and the white hunter a turkey-buzzard; and these two birds were all that either of them were able to meet with. The proceeds of the day’s hunt were brought together; and now arose a difficulty about an equal division of the game. Both knew well enough the value of a good fat turkey; and both were as well acquainted with the utter worthlessness of the buzzard—which was in fact worth less than nothing, as its filthy odour was extremely repulsive. It was evident that the only way of making a fair division would have been to cut the turkey in two equal parts, and each to take one of the halves. The white man, however, would not agree to this; but proposed that one of them should take the whole turkey, and the other the buzzard.

“‘It’s a pity,’ argued he, ‘to spoil the birds. It’s better for each of us to take one.’

“‘Very well,’ said the Indian. ‘Shall we draw lots for the choice?’

"'Oh, no,' replied the other. 'It's not worth while to do that. I'll deal fairly with you. I'll take the turkey, and let you have the buzzard; or, you can take the buzzard, and I'll keep the turkey.'

"The Indian reflected, that in either case the buzzard would fall to his share; but the white man's proposition seemed a just one; and, as he could find no flaw in its fairness, he was constrained, though reluctantly, to accept it. The white hunter, therefore, shouldered his turkey, and trudged off homewards, leaving the poor Indian supperless in the woods."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed François, "what a shallow Indian he must have been to be so easily outwitted!"

"Ah!" said Lucien, "he was not the only one of his race, who has been similarly deceived by white men. Many a pewter dollar has been passed upon these simple sons of the forest, in exchange for their furs and peltries. I have reason to suspect that one very rich fur-trader, now dead, laid the foundation of his immense fortune in this way; but my suspicions do not amount to positive proof, and therefore I do not assert it for a fact. Perhaps some historian may one day assail even the character of the good Penn; who is said to have purchased from the Indians a territory of three square miles, but took care to have it measured off as three miles square! I hope the story is not a true one."

"Why, that," said François, "is almost the same trick as Dido performed with the bull's hide."

"Yes," replied his brother; "so you see that dishonesty belongs exclusively to no age or nation. It has existed in the past, and will continue to exist, until men, becoming more and more highly educated, will be moved by nobler ambition than the mere spirit of gain. I believe there is such a time in the far future."

The conversation was again directed to the subject of the vultures. These now formed a flock of at least two hundred; and others were still arriving upon the

ground. As fresh ones came, they would wheel about for awhile in the air, and then drop down and perch themselves on the trees and rocks. Some sat crouching with drooping wings, and heads drawn in—so that their long naked necks were quite concealed under their ruff-like collars. Others stood erect, with both wings raised from the body, half unfolded, and held "a-kimbo," as eagles are often seen, and as they are sometimes represented upon coins and standards. It is supposed that both vultures and eagles spread their wings in this fashion to cool themselves when they are too warm, and sun themselves when too cold—for they do so in cold, as well as warm weather; and in this attitude they exhibit a singular and rather pleasing picture.

Some of the vultures could be seen descending from the very highest regions of the air. They could be noted like little specks against the blue sky, gradually growing larger and larger, until their broad wings cast moving shadows upon the sunlit sward, as the birds floated spirally downward. Others were observed approaching in a horizontal direction—some of them seeming no bigger than sparrows, as they first caught the eye upon the distant horizon.

"What a distance some of them must have travelled!" remarked François; "and how do you think they know where to come? There was not one in sight when we killed those big-horns."

"They have been guided by their scent, of course," replied Basil; "they have great power in that way."

"Not so, brother," interrupted Lucien; "that is one of the errors of your closet-naturalists—your Buffons and Cuviers—propagated by them, until it has become proverbial. Strange to say, it is altogether erroneous. It has been proved that vultures possess the sense of smell in a less degree even than most other creatures. Dogs and wolves far excel them in this respect."

"How, then, have they found this carrion, for instance?"

"By their sight—for that sense they possess in a high degree of perfection."

“But how can that be, Luce?” rejoined Basil. “See! yonder are some coming from the eastward. Now, as the butte is between them and the big-horn, how is it possible they could have seen it?”

“I do not say they have; but they have seen others, who have seen others, who in their turn have seen others, who actually have seen the carrion.”

“Oh! I understand; you mean that some one or more have first spied it; and, while making towards it, have been observed by others at a greater distance; and those again who have followed them have been followed by others still more distant, and so on.”

“Precisely so; and this at once accounts for the fabulous stories of vultures scenting carrion at the distance of miles—none of which stories are true, but have been propagated by men who, perhaps, never saw a vulture in the air, but who, in order to make their books amusing, have readily adopted the exaggerated tales of every Munchausen they could meet with.”

“Your theory is certainly the more probable one.”

“It is the true one. It has been proved to be so by numerous experiments with vultures; all of which have gone to show, that these birds have anything but a keen sense of smell. On the contrary, it is remarkably weak; and I think it is well for them it is so, considering the sort of food they live upon.”

“This flock must have gathered from all parts,” remarked François; “we see them coming in from every point of the compass. No doubt some of them have travelled fifty miles.”

“As likely an hundred,” rejoined Lucien. “Such a journey is a mere bagatelle to them. Now, if I knew the precise moment at which the carrion was discovered by the first one, I could tell how far each of the others had come—that is, each of them whose arrival we are now witnessing.”

“But how could you do that, brother?” demanded Basil and François, in

astonishment; “pray tell us how?”

“I should make my calculation thus:—In the first place, they have all started at the same time.”

“At the same time!” interrupted Basil; “how can that be, if some of them were an hundred miles off?”

“No matter what distance,” replied Lucien; “it is all the same. They have all commenced their flight hither, not exactly, but nearly, at the same moment. Is it not plain? These birds, while hunting for their food, sweep through the air in great circles. Each of these circles overlooks a large tract of the earth’s surface below. Their circumferences approach or intersect each other—so that, in fact, the whole country is under a network of them. Now, as soon as one of the vultures, thus sailing about, discovers with far-seeing eye the carrion below, he immediately drops from his high orbit, and wings his way downward. He is observed by that one circling nearest him; who, well knowing the cause of the altered flight of his companion, at once forsakes his own orbit and follows; and he, in his turn, is followed by another; and so on to the end of the chain.”

“But how can one of them tell that the other is gone in pursuit of prey?” inquired François, interrupting Lucien in his explanation.

“Suppose you saw Basil at a great distance off on the prairie, could you not tell by his actions when he had started game, and was in pursuit of it?”

“Oh! yes! I could easily.”

“Well, then, the vultures, who have far keener sight than you, understand each other’s movements thoroughly—even to the shaking of a feather—so that they can easily tell when one of their number has a good dinner in sight.

“I think I have shown,” continued Lucien, “that they all start within a few seconds of the same time; and as they fly in a nearly direct line towards the object, if we knew the rate at which they go, it would only remain for us to mark the date of their

arrival, to be able to tell how far they had come. Of course it is supposed that we have already noted the time when the first one came upon the spot.

“If we suppose,” continued Lucien, as he pointed up to the vultures, “that the first of these has alighted here two hours ago, and we allow them a flight of thirty miles an hour, we may then safely conclude that some of those now coming in have made a journey of sixty miles this morning. What think you of my theory?”

“It is, to say the least of it, a curious one, brother,” replied Basil.

“But what are they waiting for now?” demanded François; “why don’t they at once fall to, and enjoy it while it is fresh?”

François’ interrogatory was a very natural one. Most of the vultures, instead of attacking the carrion, were, as we have already seen, sitting perched upon rocks and trees—some of them in listless attitudes, as though they were not hungry, and did not care to eat.

Basil proffered an explanation.

“No doubt,” said he, “they are waiting until the flesh becomes putrid. It is said that they prefer it in that state.”

“And that,” remarked Lucien, “is another assertion that has no foundation in fact. They do not prefer it in that state. On the contrary, it is certain that vultures like their food better when fresh, and eat it so when they can get it.”

“And what hinders them now?” inquired François.

“The tough hide hinders them. These birds do not possess the great muscular power in their claws that eagles do, else you would soon see the big-horn reduced to a skeleton. They are waiting until its skin becomes more tender, through decomposition, so that they may be able to tear it open. That is why they are waiting.”

Such was evidently the true explanation; for each of the new-comers was seen to

attack the carcass; and, after finding he could make nothing of it, fly off and settle quietly down on the rocks or trees.

As the boys watched them, however, some more eager than the rest effected an incision—at the spot where Basil's bullet had entered the body of the animal—and were rapidly widening it. The others, perceiving this, began to fly toward the spot; and, in less than five minutes, the tree was black with the filthy birds, until they crowded each other upon the branches. Several perched upon the limbs and horns of the animal itself, until there was not a space left for another to stand upon. But their united weight, combined with that of the carcass, was too much for the roots of the pine. A loud crash was heard, followed by the sharp rat-like squeaking of the vultures, as they flapped hurriedly away; and as the broken tree bent downwards, the body of the big-horn was precipitated to the earth, and fell upon the rocks below!

There was a great commotion among the assembled birds; and the sound of their broad wings, hurriedly beating the air, could have been heard for miles off; but their fright was soon over, and they all settled down again near the carrion.

The accident was in their favour rather than otherwise. The already decomposing body, by falling from such a vast height upon the sharp rocks, was mangled, and the skin burst open! This the foul birds were not slow in perceiving; and first one, and then another, flapped towards it, and commenced their horrid meal. In a few moments they were crowding over the body, hissing like geese, striking at each other with wings, beak, and claws, and altogether exhibiting such a scene of ravenous hunger and angry passion as would be difficult to portray. They soon got in among the entrails of the animal, and commenced dragging them forth. Sometimes two of them would seize a long string of these, and each swallowing from opposite ends, would meet each other in the middle of the piece. Then would be witnessed a singular scene, as the birds dragged one another over the ground, each trying to make the other disgorge his filthy morsel! The young hunters, amused

by these curious episodes, agreed to remain and watch them for awhile; and with this intent they dismounted from their horses, so as to relieve the animals of their weight.

A new object of interest now presented itself to their attention. François discovered it. François had been directing his eyes upward, watching the graceful motions of such of the vultures as were still in the air. All at once he was heard to exclaim,—

"A white buzzard! a white buzzard!"

Lucien and Basil saw that François pointed to the sky overhead. They raised their eyes in that direction. There, sure enough, was a white bird; but of what species neither of them could make out. It was flying at a vast elevation—higher, apparently, than any of the buzzards; but even at that great height it appeared larger than any of them. Like them, it seemed to sail about with great ease, as if the sky was its natural home.

When first observed, it appeared about as large as a gull; and the boys might have taken it for one—not knowing any other white bird likely to be flying about at such a height—but as there were several buzzards near it, and evidently below it, and as these looked no bigger than swallows, what must be its size? It was not only bigger than a buzzard, but, at least, three times the size of any one of them. Thus calculated Lucien, and his calculation was not far from the truth.

The strange bird then could be no gull. What was it? A swan? No. Its mode of flight answered that question at once. It bore no resemblance whatever to the short rapid flapping of the swan, nor to the flight of any water-bird. Was it a pelican? or perhaps a white ibis (Tantalus alba)? or the white egret heron (Ardea egretta)? No; it was none of these. The slow laborious flight of these great wading birds would have been at once recognised by any of the boys, who were accustomed to see them often hovering over the bayous of Louisiana. But this bird flew differently from any of these. It used its wings more after the manner of the buzzards themselves or the

black vultures; but as the boys could think of no white bird of similar flight, they were puzzled as to what it might be. Its size and mode of flying would have led them to believe it was an eagle; but its colour forbade this supposition. There were no white eagles, that ever they had heard of.

I have said that, when first seen by François, the strange bird appeared about the size of a gull; but as the young hunters stood gazing up at it, they saw that it was gradually becoming larger and larger. They knew from this that it was descending towards the earth, and, to all appearance, directly over the spot occupied by themselves and the vultures. As they had all three grown very curious to know what sort of a creature it might be, they were expressing their hopes that it would continue its descent. They knew that it must have seen them already; and it would, therefore, be useless for them to attempt concealing themselves. In fact, there was no cover for them, had they wished to do so.

As they stood watching and waiting, an exclamation, uttered by all three at the same moment, announced that another white bird was in sight! It was still high up, like a spot of snow upon the sky; but it, too, was making downward, in the track of the former, and appeared to be of the same species. This soon became evident; for the one last seen, descending more vertically, soon overtook the other; and both together continued to sail downward upon a spiral curve.

In a few moments they had arrived within two hundred yards of the earth; and now they circled slowly around, looking down as they flew.

They were directly over the spot occupied by the vultures; and as the day was one of the brightest, the boys had an opportunity of beholding two of the most beautiful birds they had ever seen. They were not entirely white—although, in looking at them from below, they appeared so; but as, in sailing round the circle, they sometimes held themselves sideways in the air, their backs at intervals could be seen distinctly. It was then noticed that the upper part of their bodies was of a rich cream

colour, while their wings above—both plumes and coverts—were of a glossy brown. Their tails were tipped with black; but the whole of the under part of their bodies was of a pure milk-like white. But the most singular appearance about these birds was presented on their heads and necks. These were entirely naked of feathers as far down as the shoulders—where the neck was encircled by a large ruff that looked like a tippet—and the naked skin of both head and neck exhibited the most brilliant colours of orange and red. These colours were not mixed nor mottled together; but each belonged to separate parts of the membrane, forming distinct and regular figures—according to the manner in which the cartilaginous covering is itself most singularly divided. Their beaks were orange-red; and over their bases grew crest-like protuberances, like the comb of a cock. Their eyes had dark pupils and white irides, encircled by rings of a deep red colour; and, in short, the whole appearance of these beautiful creatures was such that, like the peacock, when once seen, they could never be forgotten.

“I have never seen one of them before,” remarked Lucien, “but I have no difficulty in telling what they are.”

“What?” inquired Basil and François, impatiently.

“King-vultures.”

As Lucien said this, the birds, that did not seem to regard the presence of the party, swooped suddenly down towards the carrion. The boys followed them with their eyes—curious to witness what effect their arrival would have upon the buzzards and black vultures. To the surprise of all, not one of the latter was now to be seen near the carcass! While the attention of the party had been directed to the king-vultures, the others had been regarding them as well; and, knowing from experience what these great birds were, both buzzards and black vultures had scattered precipitately, and now sat upon the rocks at a respectful distance!

The king-vultures, without seeming to heed their presence, hopped up to the carrion,

and commenced tearing it with their beaks. In a few minutes these creatures, that had appeared so clean and beautiful—for the king-vultures are as proud of their plumage as peacocks, and usually keep it in the best order—exhibited a picture of filth that was disgusting to look upon. The brilliant hue of their heads and necks was changed into a dark blood colour; and their white breasts became dappled with gore. Their vulturous appetites rendered them regardless of all else.

“Shall we fire, and kill one?” asked François.

“No,” said Lucien, “it is not right to deprive the poor creatures of life. If you wish to get a nearer view of them, have patience, and your wish may be gratified without the expenditure of powder and lead.”

What Lucien said proved correct. At the end of half an hour or so, the birds appeared to have eaten as much as they could get into their stomachs; and commenced stalking over the ground with a heavy sluggish gait. The boys, who had waited patiently, now ran forward; and, finding that the vultures were unable to rise into the air, after a chase—in which Marengo took a prominent part—secured them both.

But they did not hold them long; for the moment that François, who was the most eager to seize them, laid his hands upon one, he let it go again with an exclamation of disgust; and ran faster from the vulture, than the latter could run from him!

The fetid odour of the creatures—which was quite as strong as that of the carrion itself—was too much for the olfactory nerves of our heroes; and they were all three glad enough to let the king-vultures off without a second encounter.

As they returned to their horses, they observed that the buzzards and black vultures were once more collecting about the remains of the big-horn. They had been joined by several prairie-wolves; and these were snarling and snapping—now driving off the birds, and now receiving a blow from the long wings of the latter, that caused them to growl more fiercely than ever. Our adventurers did not wait for the finale of this hideous scene; but remounting, once more headed their horses to the prairie.

Chapter Thirty Two.

More Talk about the Vultures.

They conversed about the vultures, as they rode away from the butte. The naturalist of the party had much to say of these picturesque birds; and the curiosity of Basil and François had been excited by the appearance of a species new to them—the king himself.

“With regard to the vultures,” observed Lucien, “the study of their natural history has been considerably impeded by the closet-naturalists, and particularly by the Frenchmen—who are fonder than all others of making a parade of science, by the absurd multiplication of genera and species. This, in the absence of any real knowledge of the habits of the animals, gives them an opportunity of adding something to what has been already said; and leaves the reader under the impression that these learned anatomists know all about the thing; and that is what such gentlemen desire, and nothing more.

“There are not over two dozen species of vultures in the world; and yet the French naturalists make almost as many genera of them, multiplying high-sounding names to such an extent, that the mind of the student is quite bewildered with what would otherwise prove a most simple study.

“All the vultures are so similar in their physiognomy and habits, that they might be treated as one genus. Indeed, it would not lead to great confusion in ornithological science, if they were generically classed with the eagles—as both kinds have many points of similitude. The vultures often kill their prey as eagles do; and it is certain that they do not prefer it in a putrid state. The eagles do not always kill their prey, and many of them eat carrion. Some of the vultures—such as the lammergeyer—have almost all the habits of the eagle. The lammergeyer always kills what he eats, unless when pressed by hunger; and there is a singular fact in relation to the food of this bird,—he prefers certain parts of the bones of animals to their

flesh!”

It is somewhat strange that the boy hunter, Lucien, should have known this “fact,” as I believe it is not in possession of the naturalists. I, myself, was made acquainted with it by one of the “feeders” of the superb collection in Regent’s Park—who had observed this propensity for bone-eating in a young African lammergeyer. He had observed also that the bird was always healthier, and in better spirits, on the days when he was indulged in his favourite osseous diet. These men usually know more of natural history than the catalogue-makers and teeth-measurers of the museum and the closet.

“Perhaps,” continued Lucien, “one of the most essential points of difference between the vulture and eagle lies in the claws. The claws of the vultures are less developed, and their limbs want the muscular power that those of eagles possess. Hence the former are less able to kill a living animal, or tear the carcass of a dead one. They are unable, also, to raise a large prey in their claws; and the stories of vultures carrying off deer, and full-grown sheep, are mere fables. Even the condor—the largest of the species known—cannot lift into the air a weight of more than ten pounds. A deer of that weight would be rather a small one, I fancy. Most of the wonderful stories about the condor were propagated by the discoverers and conquerors of Spanish America; who, if they were great conquerors, were also the greatest braggarts the world ever saw. The books they have left behind them fully prove my assertion; and I believe that their accounts of the Mexican and Peruvian nations, whom they subdued, are not a whit less exaggerated than their stories about the condor. Three centuries could not have so completely swept away the vestiges of such a civilisation as they describe—leaving scarcely a trace of it to attest the truth of their assertions. It is true, that in these countries are to be found monuments of a high state of civilisation; but these were in ruins long previous to the discovery of the Spaniards; and the feeble races who submitted so easily to the latter, knew no more about the builders of these monuments than we do. The same vestiges of a

civilised people are found in the deserts of North America; and yet the Spanish writers can tell nothing of them, farther than that they existed at the period of the discovery just as they are now."

"How many kinds of vultures are there in America?" inquired François, whose mind ran more upon the present than the past; and who, as we have already hinted, was a great boy for birds.

"There are five species well-known," replied Lucien; "and these are so different from each other that there is no difficulty in distinguishing them. These species form two genera—Sarco ramphus and Cathartes. The Sarcoramphs have a fleshy protuberance over the beak—hence the generic name, which is a compound of two Greek words, signifying flesh, and beak or bill. The Cathartes, or 'purging-vultures,' derive their name from a singular habit—that of throwing up their food again, not only when feeding their young, but also when providing for one another during the period of incubation.

"The condor is a true Sarcoramph—in fact, one of the most marked features of this bird is the fleshy cartilaginous crest that surmounts his head and part of his beak. This, however, is only found upon the males, as the female birds are not crested in a similar manner. The condor, when in full plumage, might be called a black-and-white bird. His body underneath, his tail, shoulders, and the butts as well as the outer margins of his wings, are all of a dark, nearly black, colour; but his wings, when closed, give him a large space of greyish white from the back to the tail. The downy ruff around the breast and neck is milk-white, and the naked wrinkled skin of the neck and head is of a blackish red or claret colour, while the legs are ashy blue. It is only when full-grown—nearly three years old—that the condor obtains these colours; and up to that time he is without the white collar around his neck. The young birds, for many months after they are hatched, have no feathers, but a soft thick down, like young goslings or cygnets; and even at two

years of age their colour is not black and white, but a dirty, brownish black.

“The full-grown condor usually measures about eight feet from tip to tip of his wings; but there can be no question that specimens exist, and have been seen by truthful travellers, that measured fourteen feet and some inches!

“The condor, like other vultures, feeds principally upon carrion; but, when pressed with hunger, he will kill sheep, lambs, vicunas, young lamas, deer, and other animals. The larger kinds he can master, by attacking their eyes with his powerful beak—which is his principal weapon. That he can kill boys of sixteen years old, as Garcilaso de la Vega asserts, is, like many other statements of that celebrated author, simply untrue; but that he frequently attacks, and, according to the Indians, sometimes puts to death little children, is probable enough. If he can kill full-grown sheep or vicunas, there is nothing remarkable about his doing the same for a child five or six years of age; and, indeed, it is certain that such instances have occurred.

“Almost any eagles can do as much, and would, provided they were hungry, and children were left exposed in the neighbourhood of their haunts. The condor, however, is one of the most ravenous of his species. One in a state of captivity has been known to eat eighteen pounds of flesh in a single day! But that this bird can raise into the air with his claws, and carry off large animals, such as deer and sheep, as asserted by Acosta, Desmarchais, and other French and Spanish writers, is altogether fabulous.

“The condor, unlike the vultures of most countries, is not under the protection of the law. His destructive habits among the lambs, and young lamas and alpacas, render him an object to be persecuted rather than protected. He is, therefore, either killed or captured, whenever an opportunity offers. There can be but little use made either of his flesh or his feathers; but as he is an object of curiosity, he is often kept as a pet about the houses of the Chilians and Peruvians. Live ones are frequently to be seen in the markets of Valparaiso, and other South American cities.

“The natives who hunt the condor have various ways of capturing him. Sometimes they lie in wait near a carcass, and shoot the bird when it alights; but it is very difficult to kill them in this way, on account of their strong thick feathers, as well as the tenacity of life which they possess: it can only be done when the shot takes effect in a vital part. This method, therefore, is not much practised. A second plan is, to wait until the condor has gorged himself to repletion, when, like most other vultures, he is unable to fly for some time after. The hunters then gallop up, and lasso him from their horses; or impede his flight by flinging the ‘bolas’ around his legs. The ‘bolas’ are thongs of leather, with leaden balls at each end; and these, when adroitly thrown, twine themselves round the shanks of the condor, and prevent his escape. A third mode is still a surer one. The hunters build a large penn, in which they place a quantity of carrion. The palisades that inclose this penn are made so high, that, when the bird has gorged himself, he is unable either to rise into the air or get out of the enclosure in any way; and he is then overtaken and captured, or beaten to death with clubs.

“The Indians kill the condor by stones, projected from slings to a great distance—a species of weapon which these people use with much dexterity.

“Condors are taken alive in traps and snares; but there is an excellent and somewhat curious method of capturing them alive, sometimes employed by the Indians of the Sierras. It is this:—The hunter provides himself with the skin of some animal, such as an ox or horse, freshly taken off, and with a piece of the flesh adhering to it. With this he proceeds to some open place, where the condors, wheeling high in the air above, may readily see him. Having chosen a spot, he crouches down upon the ground, and draws the skin over him, with the fleshy side turned upward. In this situation he remains; but not long, until some one of the condors, with his far-piercing glance, espies the ensanguined object, and comes swooping downward. The bird, having no suspicion, hops boldly upon the hide; and commences tearing at the piece of flesh. The hunter, underneath, now cautiously feels for one of its legs;

and having assured himself of this, grasps it firmly, folding the foot of the bird in the soft loose flaps of the hide. Having already provided himself with a long rope, he adroitly nooses it around the ankle; and, taking the other end in his hand, he now appears from under the skin, and shows himself to his astonished captive. Of course, during the operation of 'tethering,' the condor flaps and struggles with all his might; and were it not for the hide which protects the hunter, the latter would be very apt to come off with the loss of an eye, or be otherwise dreadfully torn by the powerful beak of the bird. When the hunter has fairly secured his prize, he passes a leathern thong through its nostrils, and knotting it firmly, leads the condor off in triumph. In this same manner the bird is kept chained, so long as he is wanted. With the string through his nostrils, and fastened by the other end to a picket-pin in the ground, the captive can walk about freely within the area of a circle. Sometimes forgetting that he is chained, he attempts to fly off; but, on reaching the end of his string, the sudden jerk brings him to the ground again; and he invariably falls upon his head!"

"But how is it," inquired François, "since the condors are hunted in this way, and so easily captured, that they are not long since exterminated? They are so large, that any one can see them at a great distance; and they can be easily approached, I believe; yet there are still great flocks of them—are there not?"

"You are quite right," answered Lucien; "they are still numerous, both in the Andes of Chili and Peru. I think I can explain this. It is because they have a safe place, not only to breed but to retire to, whenever they feel inclined. Numerous peaks of the Andes, where these birds dwell, shoot up far above the line of perpetual snow. Away up on these summits the condor breeds, among naked rocks where there is no vegetation. No one ever thinks of ascending them; and, indeed, many of these summits are inaccessible to the human foot. Not even animals of any species are found there, nor birds—except the condor himself. He is the sole lord of that region. Therefore, unlike most other creatures, these birds have a retreat where no enemy can come near them, and where they may bring forth their young, and rear them in

perfect security. Still more, they can go to rest at night without fear of being disturbed, unless by the crash of the falling avalanche, or the roar of the loud thunder that often reverberates through these Alpine regions. But the condor is not in the least afraid of these noises; and he heeds them not, but sleeps securely, even while the red lightning is playing around his eyrie.

"Now, it is very evident that birds, or any other wild animals, possessing a secure place, both to bring forth their young or escape to in time of danger, will not easily be extirpated. It is because their places of breeding and retreat are accessible—not only to man but to hosts of other enemies—that such creatures as eagles and the like are so scarce. Not so with the condor. His race can never become extinct so long as the Andes exist; and that is likely to be for a good long period, I fancy."

"What sort of nests do they build?" inquired François.

"They do not build nests," replied Lucien, "they choose a cavity in the rocks, or in the soil around them, where they lay two large white oval eggs, and hatch them just as other vultures do. Strange to say, very little is known of their mode of life in their elevated haunts; but this is because the natives of the Sierras rarely venture up to the high regions where the condors dwell. All they know of them is what they see, when these great birds descend upon the plateaux, or inhabited mountain-valleys, in search of food—which they do only in the mornings and evenings. During mid-day the condor usually perches upon some high rock, and there goes to sleep. When pressed by hunger, they sometimes extend their range down to the hot coast lands of the Pacific Ocean; but they are evidently birds that can bear cold much better than heat.

"The King-vulture," continued Lucien, "is the next species that claims our attention. He is also a Sarcoramph (Sarcoramphus Papa), and the only one of that genus besides the condor. He is unlike the condor in many respects. He is not much of a mountain bird, but prefers the low savannas and open plains. He prefers heat to cold, and he is rarely met with outside the tropics, although he makes occasional visits to

the peninsula of Florida and the northern plains of Mexico; but in these places he is only a rare and migratory bird. He feeds principally upon carrion, and dead fish that have been left by the drying-up of ponds and lakes; but he will also kill and eat serpents, lizards, and small mammiferous animals. Bartram states that in Florida he only appears after the savannas have been on fire, when he is seen to pass over the ground amidst the black ashes, hunting for and devouring the snakes and lizards that have been killed by the fire. Bartram, therefore, infers that his food must consist altogether of roasted reptiles; but as it would be sometimes difficult for him to procure a supply of these ready-cooked, I think we may safely conclude that he does not object to eating them raw. The fanciful ideas of these old naturalists are sometimes very amusing from their very absurdity.

"The king-vultures live in pairs as eagles do—though they are often seen in flocks, when a carcass or some other object has brought them together.

"This bird has been called the 'painted' vulture on account of the brilliant colours upon his head and neck, which do, in fact, present the appearance of the most vivid painting. He derives his name of a 'King-vulture,' not from the possession of any noble qualities, but from the manner in which he tyrannises over the common vultures (aura and atratus), keeping them from their food until he has gorged himself with the choicest morsels. In this sense the name is most appropriate; as such conduct presents a striking analogy to that of most human kings, towards the common people.

"Next to the condor in size," continued the naturalist, "and, perhaps, quite equal to him, is the great Californian vulture—the 'condor of the north.' He is classed among the purging-vultures (Cathartes Californianus). This bird may be called black, as he is nearly of that hue all over the body; although some of the secondary wing feathers are white at the tips, and the coverts are brown. Black, however, is the prevailing colour of the bird. His naked head and neck is reddish; but he wants the crest or

comb, which the condors and king-vultures have. On the posterior part of his neck, long lance-shaped feathers form a sort of ruff or collar, as in other birds of this kind.

“The Californian vulture derives his name from the country which he inhabits—the great chain of the Californian mountains—the Sierra Nevada—which extends almost without interruption through twenty degrees of latitude. That he sometimes visits the Rocky Mountains, and their kindred the Cordilleras of the Sierra Madre in Mexico, there can be little doubt. A large bird occasionally seen among these mountains, and pronounced to be the condor, is far more likely to have been the Californian vulture. As far as size is concerned, this mistake might easily be made, for the latter bird is nearly, if not quite, as large as the former. A specimen of the Californian vulture has been measured, which proved to be four feet eight inches in length, and nine feet eight inches between the tips of the wings! Now, this is actually larger than the average size of the condors; and it is not improbable, therefore, that individuals of the Californian species may yet be found quite equal to the largest of the South American birds.

“The Californian vulture has been seen as far north as the thirty-ninth parallel of latitude. He is common in some parts of Oregon, where he makes his nest in the tops of the tallest trees, constructing it of coarse thorny twigs and brambles, somewhat after the manner of eagles. As many of the great spruce and pine-trees of Oregon and California are three hundred feet in height, and twenty feet thick at the base, this vulture is almost as secure among their tops as the condor on his mountain summit; but to render himself doubly safe, he always selects such trees as overhang inaccessible cliffs or rapid rivers. The female lays only two eggs, which are nearly jet-black, and as large as those of a goose; and the young, like those of the condor, are for many weeks covered with down instead of feathers. Like other vultures, the food of this species is carrion or dead fish; but he will follow after wounded deer and other animals, and commence devouring them as soon as they have dropped; and a score of these birds will devour the carcass of a deer, or even of a horse or

mule, in about one hour's time, leaving nothing but a well-cleaned skeleton! While eating, they are strong enough and bold enough to keep at a distance wolves, dogs, and all such animals as may attempt to share with them.

"Perhaps no bird of the vulture species is so shy and wary as this one. Except when he is gorged with eating, he will never allow the hunter to approach within shot; and even then, his thick heavy plumage renders him most difficult to be killed. His wings are full and long, and his flight is most graceful and easy, not unlike that of his congener the turkey-buzzard.

"I have said," continued Lucien, "that naturalists make out five species of American vultures. The remaining two, the turkey-buzzard and black vulture, or, as he is sometimes called, the 'carrion-crow,' we have already had before us; but, I believe, there are more than five species on the continent of America. There is a bird in Guayana called the 'gavilucho,' which I believe to be a vulture differing from all these; and, moreover, I do not think that the 'red-headed gallinazo' of South America is the same as the turkey-buzzard of the north. He is, more probably, a distinct species of cathartes; for, although he resembles the turkey-buzzard in shape and size, his plumage appears to me of a purer black, and the skin of his head, neck, and legs, of a much more vivid red—having an appearance as if these parts had been painted. I think naturalists will yet discover, that besides the great Californian vulture, there are three if not four species of the smaller cathartes."

So much for the vultures of America.

Chapter Thirty Three.

Supping upon a Skeleton.

Our young travellers had now arrived upon the great buffalo-path. Without halting, they turned their horses to the right, and followed the trail. It led directly towards the north, and they had no difficulty in following it, as the prairie, for a tract of miles in

width, was cut up by the hoofs of the animals; and, in some parts, where the ground was softer and more loamy, the surface presented the appearance of having been turned up by the plough! At other places the hard green turf had resisted the hoof, but even there the grass was so beaten down, that the trail was a perfectly plain one. Without troubling themselves about the direction, therefore, the little party rode briskly forward, full of hope that they would soon overtake the buffaloes. But their hopes were not so soon to be realised. These animals had gone upon their annual migration to the north; and as they were keeping almost continually upon the run—scarcely stopping to rest or pasture themselves—it would be no easy matter to come up with them. At night our travellers were obliged to diverge from the trail, in order to get grass for their horses; for, upon a belt of at least four miles in width which the buffaloes had passed over, not a blade of grass was left standing.

But another want now began to be felt by the party—one that filled them with serious apprehensions. At the end of the second day their stock of dried bear's meat gave out—not an ounce of it was left—and they lay down upon the prairie supperless and hungry. What rendered the prospect still more disheartening, they were passing through a region entirely destitute of game—where no animal is ever seen except the buffaloes themselves, an occasional antelope, or the ever-present prairie-wolf. It was a region essentially desert in its character; although the dry plains were covered with a sward of the famous "buffalo-grass" (Sesleria dactyloides), which forms the favourite pasture of these wild cattle. As for the antelopes, they love these desert solitudes; as their free open range affords them an opportunity, from their superior fleetness, of escaping from every enemy. But in these parts they are more than usually shy; and although several of them were seen on the way, our hunters vainly endeavoured to approach within shooting distance of them. Wolves they could have shot; but they were not as yet prepared to satisfy their hunger upon the flesh of these filthy, fox-like, creatures. That large troops of wolves had gone forward, hanging after the great herd, was evident. Every now and then our

hunters saw proof of this, in the clean-picked skeletons of buffaloes that lay along the path. These they knew were such as had got disabled and separated from the drove; for numerous accidents of this kind—owing to the bulls goring one another, or being enfeebled by age and disease—take place during the migration of the vast herds. Were it not so, the wolves would never think of following them as they do; for a buffalo in good health can scatter a whole pack of these cowardly, skulking jackals. But the average accidents which occur when such numbers of buffaloes are together—the prospect of old ones, weak and weary, being separated from their companions—of numbers getting mired upon the banks of some muddy river, or drowned in crossing it—of cows heavy with calf falling behind, or with calves already on the hoof, loitering for the purpose of suckling them—the prospect of these chances, combined with the still more enticing hope that the buffaloes will be attacked by a party of Indian hunters, often carries a pack of wolves for hundreds of miles across the prairie on the heels of a great herd. In fact, some of these wolves, both of the white and prairie species, seem to have no fixed place of abode; but hang upon the skirts of the buffalo "gangs" throughout all their extended migrations.

I have said that, upon the second night after leaving the butte, our travellers went to sleep supperless. On the third day, they began to feel the cravings of hunger in good earnest. Neither beast nor bird appeared in sight upon the wild desert plains that stretched inimitably around them. About noon, as they were riding through a thicket of the wild sage (Artemisia tridentata), a brace of those singular birds, sage-cocks or prairie-grouse (Tetrao urophasianus), the largest of all the grouse family, whirred up before the heads of their horses. François, with his ever-ready gun, fired at them, but they were too distant for the shot; and the next moment both disappeared over the swells of the prairie. The sight only tantalised the unsuccessful hunters, and added to the hungry craving of appetites already sharp almost beyond endurance. They felt that there was no chance of getting anything to eat, before they should come up with the buffaloes. That was their only hope; and they spurred their horses afresh, and

rode on as fast as the animals could travel.

Towards night their hunger had increased to a painful degree; and the eyes of all wandered occasionally upon Jeanette and the dog Marengo. They began to contemplate the necessity of sacrificing one or other of these animals. It would be a sad alternative—as both the mule and the dog were looked upon more in the light of companions than slaves. Both had done good service during the expedition. But for Marengo, François might never have been found; and Jeanette, in addition to having satisfactorily accomplished the duty assigned to her, had saved them from an encounter with one of the cougars. But all these services must now be forgotten, when starvation was the alternative; and our adventurers began to talk seriously about which of these two faithful servants should be made the first victim. Neither was fat. Jeanette had never been so in all her life—at least so long as her present owners had been acquainted with her—and Marengo had grown gaunt and bony upon this lengthened expedition. Jeanette could not be otherwise than tough, and Marengo looked anything but tender. So far as that was concerned, it might be a toss-up which of them was first “put to the knife.”

But other considerations had their weight with the boys. Basil disliked parting with his hound, that for many years had been a great favourite, and the dog was endeared to all from late circumstances. His conduct at the time when François was lost—his usefulness as a sentinel at many a lonely camp-fire—and his valuable services rendered upon other occasions, had fixed him firmly in the affections of his young masters; and they would have endured hunger to the utmost extremity rather than sacrifice him. Jeanette, on the other hand, was but a mule—a selfish, wicked, kicking mule. This was true; but to them she had been a useful animal, and would not have kicked any one of them, although she would have kicked all the world besides. Still the feeling with which Jeanette was regarded was more a feeling of gratitude than of love. It was far different from the sentiment held towards Marengo.

With these considerations passing through the minds of our hungry hunters, it is easy to guess the result of their deliberations. The sentence was at length pronounced—a unanimous one—Jeanette must die!

Poor old Jeanette! She little knew what they were talking about. She little thought that her days were about being numbered—that the time was nigh when she should carry a pack no more. She little expected that she was about to kick up her heels upon the prairie for the last time—that in a few hours her life-blood would be let forth—and her old ribs be roasting and sputtering over a camp-fire!

Yes, it was decreed that Jeanette should die! but when and where this terrible tragedy was to take place, was not yet determined upon. At their first halting-place, of course; but where was that to be? for, after having resolved upon the death of Jeanette, they travelled on for miles without arriving at any place where it would be possible to halt for the night! No water appeared, and without water they could not with safety encamp. Early in the afternoon they had entered upon a strange tract, over which the road of the buffaloes led them. It was a part of the prairie—a series of low hills composed of pure gypsum. These extended around them, as far as our travellers could see, presenting on all sides a picture of alabaster whiteness. Neither plant, nor tree, nor any sign of vegetable life relieved the monotonous uniformity of the landscape. Turn to what side they might, their eyes were met by the lime-like surface of hill and dale, dazzling the sight with its milky whiteness. The sun, reflected upward, pierced their bodies, and parched them with thirst. They breathed a hot atmosphere filled with gypsum dust, that by the trampling of the buffalo herd had been reduced to an impalpable powder, and floated about suspended in the air. This added to the agony of their thirst; and it was difficult for them to tell whether they suffered most from the want of food, or the want of water!

How far might this singular tract extend? They could form no conjecture as to the distance. Lucien had heard that such formations sometimes stretched for many

miles. If so, they might never be able to cross it—thirsty and exhausted as both they and the animals were—for, eager to come up with the buffalo, they had rested but very little during the previous days. They began to labour under serious apprehensions. The appetite of thirst became stronger than that of hunger—its cravings more difficult to be endured.

Guided by the buffalo-tracks, they rode gloomily on, in the midst of a white cloud that enveloped them throughout all that fearful journey. They had no difficulty in following the trail. The heavy dust showed where the drove had passed; and every here and there great circular hollows showed where the buffaloes had "wallowed." The hope that these animals, guided by their usual instincts, had gone in the direction of water, to some degree sustained our travellers in their onward struggle.

The shades of evening were closing over the earth, and the alabaster hills were assuming an ashy blue colour, when the little cavalcade emerged from the dusty ravines of gypsum, and once more trod the green prairie. The country before them was still rolling, but they kept on along the well marked trail—their animals stepping more freely, as if inspired with new hope at the change which had taken place upon the surface. There was something in the appearance of the landscape ahead that led to the belief that water was not far distant; and, sure enough, it was not; for, on mounting the crest of a prairie-swell, over which ran the buffalo-trail, a small rivulet was espied in the glen below. At the sight, Jeanette, as well as the three horses, pricked up their ears; and, making an effort to trot, were soon at the bottom of the hill, and up to their knees in the water.

It was fortunate for them that it proved a freshwater stream. Had it been a salt one—and such are very common in the neighbourhood of these gypsum formations—they could never have gone farther. They would all have perished upon its banks.

But it was fresh water—cool and fresh—and our travellers first drank of it, and then

bathed themselves in its flood, until they had washed their bodies free from the annoying gypsum dust. After this they set about making some arrangements for their night bivouac.

The copious draughts of water, which all of them had taken, in some measure relieved them from the painful sensations of hunger they had experienced; and they began to consider whether they might not be able to give Jeanette a respite—at least until the morning. While deliberating upon this, they noticed that Marengo had strayed away from them. They looked around, wondering what had become of him, or where he could have gone. They espied the hound at some distance up the stream, and apparently engaged with some object upon the bank. They all ran towards him. On arriving near the spot, they perceived that it was the skeleton of a large buffalo with which the dog was engaged. The poor brute, hungry as he was, could do but little else than lick it; for the wolves had not left as much meat upon it as would have filled the smallest of his teeth! Even the pieces of torn skin that lay around had been chewed dry by these ravenous animals; and the bones appeared as free from flesh as if they had been scraped by a knife. Had an anatomist been ordered to prepare the skeleton for a museum, he could not have cleaned it more effectually.

It was not very cheering to contemplate this useless skeleton; and the boys were about returning to their camping-place, when the idea occurred to Lucien that the bones might, at least, yield a soup. He, of course, communicated this idea to the others, and it was at once agreed that they should boil them and try. It was quite a happy thought. No doubt the bones, which were fresh, and not yet dry, would make an excellent soup; and all three at once set about preparing to cook it. François gathered sage-bushes to kindle a fire with, while Basil got hold of Lucien’s little hatchet, and set to work to separate the ribs and joints of the skeleton. Lucien, seeing that there were several kinds of plants growing on the margin of the rivulet, went down to examine them—in hopes that he might find the wild onion or the prairie-turnip among them, or perhaps some other root or vegetable that might help

to enrich their pottage.

While all three were engaged in their separate duties, a loud exclamation from Basil drew the attention of his brothers. It was a shout of joy, followed by a wild laugh, like the laugh of a maniac!

François and Lucien looked up in affright—thinking that something disagreeable had happened—for they could not understand why Basil should be laughing so loudly at such a time, and under such gloomy circumstances.

As they looked at him he still continued to laugh, waving the hatchet around his head as if in triumph.

“Come here, brothers!” shouted he; “come here! Ha! ha! ha! Here’s a supper for three hungry individuals! Ha! ha! ha! What shallow fellows we are, to be sure! Why, we are as stupid as the donkey that preferred eating the hay with the bread and butter beside him. Look here! and here! and there! There’s a supper for you. Ha! ha! ha!”

Lucien and François had now arrived upon the ground; and seeing Basil point to the great joints of the buffalo, and turn them over and over, at once understood the cause of his mirth. These joints were full of marrow!

“Pounds of it,” continued Basil; “the very tit-bits of the buffalo—enough to make suppers for a dozen of us; and yet we were going to sleep supperless, or the next thing to it—going to starve in the midst of plenty! And we have been travelling among such treasures for three days past! Why, we deserve to starve for being so simple. But come, brothers! help me to carry these great joints to the fire—I’ll show you how to cook a supper.”

There are eight marrow-bones in the buffalo, containing several pounds of this substance. As Basil had heard from the old hunters, it is esteemed the most delicious part of the animal; and is rarely left behind when a buffalo has been killed. The best method of preparing it is by simply roasting it in the bone; although the Indians and trappers often eat it raw. The stomachs of our young hunters were not strong enough

for this; and a couple of the shank-bones were thrown into the fire, and covered over with red cinders.

In due time the marrow was supposed to be sufficiently baked; and the bones having been cracked by Lucien's hatchet, yielded up their savoury store—which all three ate with a great relish. A cup of cool water washed it down; and around the camp-fire of the boy hunters thirst and hunger were now contemplated only as things of the past. Jeanette was respited, without one dissentient voice.

Our adventurers were surrounded once more with the cheerful atmosphere of hope. There was still enough of marrow in the remaining bones to last them for two days at the least; for this marrow is a most nourishing food. Moreover, by following the buffalo-trail, they would be likely to fall in with other skeletons of these animals; and all apprehensions on the score of food now vanished from their minds. Another fact, which the skeleton of the buffalo revealed to them, added to their joyful anticipations. They had observed on first going up to it—that the bones were still fresh! The wolves had not been long gone from it. It could not have been a long time killed. All this showed, that the buffaloes themselves had but very recently passed over the ground, and could not be far distant. These were cheering thoughts; and for a while the young hunters sat around the sage-fire, revolving them in their minds, and conversing upon them. Then, having offered thanks to that Being who had so many times miraculously preserved them, they rolled themselves in their blankets, and, notwithstanding a heavy shower of rain that fell, once more found the solace of a good night's sleep.

Chapter Thirty Four.

The Battle of the Bulls.

Next morning the boy hunters were up and stirring at the "peep of day." They felt refreshed and cheerful. So did their animals, for the grass was good. Jeanette was frisking about on her trail-rope and endeavouring to reach "Le Chat," whom she

would have kicked and bitten to a certainty, but that the lasso-tether restrained her. Jeanette little dreamt how near she had been to her last kick. Had she known that, it is probable she would have carried herself with more sobriety, not knowing but that a similar necessity might occur again. But Jeanette knew nothing of it; and, having eaten well and drunk plentifully, she was as frisky as a kitten.

A fire was kindled, and a fresh “marrow-bone” steamed and sputtered among the blazing branches of the sage. This was soon drawn forth again, cracked, and its rich contents rifled and eaten. The remaining joints were packed upon Jeanette; the horses were saddled, the hunters leaped into their seats, and rode joyfully off upon the trail.

The country over which they now travelled was what is termed a “rolling prairie”—that is, a country without trees, but nevertheless, far from being level. The prairie is not always a level plain, as some people imagine. On the contrary, it is often of very uneven surface, containing high hills and deep valleys. The word “prairie” means properly an open level country, though it is not necessary that it should be a dead horizontal level, to entitle it to the name. It may contain hills, valleys, and long ridges. It is not necessary either that it should be entirely destitute of trees; for there are the “timber prairies,” where trees grow in “mottes” or groves, sometimes termed islands—from their resemblance to wooded islands in the sea. The “prairie” is a term used to distinguish those vast meadow-like tracts of the earth’s surface from the forest, the mountain, and the ocean. The prairies themselves are distinguished by specific names, according to what covers their surface. We have seen that there are “timber prairies” and “flower-prairies.” The latter are usually denominated “weed prairies” by the rude hunters who roam over them. The vast green meadows covered with “buffalo” grass, or “gramma,” or “mezquite” grass, are termed “grass prairies.” The tracts of salt efflorescence—often fifty miles long and nearly as wide—are called “salt prairies;” and a somewhat similar land, where soda covers the surface, are named “soda prairies.” There are vast desert plains where no

vegetation appears, save the wild sage-bushes (artemisia). These are the “sage prairies,” hundreds of miles of which exist in the central parts of the North American continent. There are prairies of sand, and “rock prairies,” where the “cut-rock” and pebble deposits cover the arid plains; and still another variety, called the “hog-wallow prairies,” where the surface for miles exhibits a rough appearance, as if it had been at some remote period turned over or “rooted” by hogs.

Most of these names have been given by the trappers—the true pioneers of this wild region. Who have an equal right to bestow them? Scientific men may explore it—topographical officers may travel over it in safety with a troop at their heels—they may proclaim themselves the discoverers of the passes and the plains, the mountains and the rivers, the fauna and the flora—on their maps they may give them the names, first of themselves, then of their patrons, then of their friends, and, lastly, of their favourite dogs and horses. They may call stupendous mountains and grand rivers by the names of Smith and Jones, of Fremont and Stansbury; but men who think justly, and even the rude but wronged trappers themselves, will laugh to scorn such scientific coxcombry.

I honour the names which the trappers have given to the features of that far land; many of which, like the Indian nomenclature, are the expressions of nature itself; and not a few of them have been baptised by the blood of these brave pioneers.

We have said that our adventurers now travelled upon a “rolling prairie.” The surface exhibited vast ridges with hollows between. Did you ever see the ocean after a storm? Do you know what a “ground-swell” is?—when the sea is heaving up in great smooth ridges without crest or foam, and deep troughs between—when the tempest has ceased to howl and the winds to blow, yet still so uneven remains the surface of the mighty deep, still so dangerous are these smooth waves, that ships rock and tumble about, and sometimes lose their masts, or are flung upon their beam ends! That is what the sailors call a “swell.” Now, if you could imagine one of these

billowy seas to be suddenly arrested in its motion, and the water transformed to solid earth, and covered with a green sward, you would have something not unlike a “rolling prairie.” Some think that, when these prairies were formed, some such rolling motion actually existed, by means of an earthquake, and that all at once the ground ceased its undulations, and stood still! It is an interesting speculation for the learned geologist.

The ridges of the prairie, upon which our adventurers were journeying, extended from east to west, and, of course, the valleys trended in the same direction. The route was northward; the path, therefore, which the travellers pursued was a continued succession of ups and downs.

Eagerly looking before them, anxiously scanning the valleys or troughs of the prairie as they surmounted each new swell, they rode onward full of hope that they would soon come in sight of the buffaloes. But they were not prepared for the sight was so soon to greet their eyes—a sight which one would have supposed would have filled them with joy, but which, on the contrary, had the effect of inspiring them with a feeling akin to terror.

They had just climbed one of the ridges that gave them a view of the valley beyond. It was a small deep valley, of nearly a circular form, and covered with a green turf. Near one side of it was a spring—the waters of which issuing forth ran nearly around the circumference of the valley, and then escaped through one of the troughs of the prairie. The course of this rivulet could be traced by the low trees—cotton-woods and willows—that fringed its banks; so that the central part of the valley presented the appearance of a small circular meadow almost surrounded by a grove.

It was in this meadow that a spectacle was offered to the eyes of our adventurers, which caused them to rein suddenly up, and sit gazing down upon it with singular emotions. The spectacle was that of a number of animals engaged in what appeared

to be a mixed and terrible combat! There was not over a dozen of them in all, but they were large animals, of fierce aspect and furious bearing; and so desperately were they assailing one another, that the green turf around them was torn and furrowed by their hoofs. It was in the middle of the meadow that this indiscriminate contest was carried on—in the open ground—and a finer spot for such an exhibition they could hardly have chosen, had they wished to accommodate a large number of spectators. The valley itself, with the ridges that encircled it, was not unlike one of the great Spanish amphitheatres, where bull-fights are carried on; while the smooth, level surface of the meadow represented the arena. The combatants, however, were engaged in no mock encounter to gratify the curiosity of an idle crowd; nor did they apprehend that there were spectators present.

The contest in which they were engaged was a real fight; and their angry roars, their hurried rushing backwards and forwards, and the loud cracking of their skulls as they came together, proved them to be in earnest.

That the animals were buffaloes was apparent at first sight. Their great bulk, the lion-like form of their bodies, but, above all, their bellowing, that resembled the “routing” of enraged bulls, convinced our young hunters that they could be no other than buffaloes—and buffaloes they were—a “gang” of old buffalo bulls engaged in one of their terrible tournaments.

I have said that our hunters, on first seeing them, were influenced by feelings of terror. But why so? What was there in the appearance of a herd of buffaloes to frighten them, since that was the very thing they had so long been in search of? Was it the angry attitudes of the animals, or their loud roaring? Nothing of the sort? No. That was not what had inspired them with fear, or, as I should rather term it, with awe. No. The reason was very different indeed. It was not because they were buffaloes, or because they were engaged in a fierce battle,—it was because they were white buffaloes!

You will again ask, why this should have been a cause of terror. Was a white buffalo not the very object of the expedition? Should the sight of one not have produced joy rather than fear? So the sight of one would; but it was the sight of so many—the mysterious spectacle of nearly a dozen of these animals together—a thing unparalleled, unheard of—it was this that inspired our adventurers with awe.

It was some time before any of the three could find words to express their astonishment. They sat in silence, gazing down into the valley. They could hardly believe the evidence of their eyes. With the palms of their hands they shaded them from the sun, and gazed still a longer while. They saw, at length, there could be no deception. Buffaloes the animals were, and white ones too!

They were not all of an uniform white, though most of them were. A few were darker about the heads and legs, with broad white flakes upon their sides, giving them a mottled appearance. The general colour, however, was whitish; and, strange to say, there was not a black or brown one in the herd!—not one of the well-known colour that buffaloes usually are! It was this that rendered them such a mysterious band in the eyes of our adventurers.

The latter, however, soon got over their surprise. There could be no doubt that they had fallen in with a herd of white buffaloes. Perhaps, thought they, there is, after all, nothing so strange in such a number of them being together. Perhaps the individuals of that colour, so rarely met with, usually associate together in this way, and keep apart from the black ones. What better fortune could have happened for them then? If they could only succeed in killing one of these creatures, it would be all that they could wish for, and all they wanted. The object of their expedition would then be accomplished; and nothing would remain but to turn their horses' heads, and take the shortest route homeward. With these ideas passing through their minds, they at once set about considering how they might kill or capture one or more of the herd.

They were not slow to decide upon a plan. The buffaloes, still continuing their angry

conflict, had not noticed them as yet, nor were they likely to do so. The hunters resolved, therefore, that two of them should remain on horseback—so as to take the animals upon the “run”—while the third was to endeavour to “approach” them on foot, and get a sure shot before they should start off, taking his chance of joining in the chase afterwards. The latter duty was assigned to Basil; who, after dismounting from his horse, and looking to his trusty rifle, commenced creeping down into the valley. Lucien and François—still in their saddles—remained upon the ridge.

Basil reached the grove of willows without being observed; and, stealing silently through, found himself within less than fifty paces of several of the herd. They were still rushing to and fro, raising the dust in clouds, roaring furiously, parting from each other, and then meeting head to head with such force that each time their skulls cracked as though both had been broken by the terrible concussion. The hunter waited until one of the largest, and apparently the whitest of them, came very near; and then, taking aim behind the fore-shoulder, fired. The huge animal was seen to tumble over; while the others, hearing the shot, or scenting the presence of an enemy, immediately left off their contest; and, breaking through the willows, scrambled up the ridge toward the open prairie.

Without waiting to look after the one that he had fired at, Basil ran toward his horse—which, at his call, was already galloping to meet him. François and Lucien were now in pursuit of the flying herd; and Basil, hastily mounting, followed after. In a few minutes the three were side by side with the buffaloes; and then could be heard the cracking of guns and pistols until the weapons of all were empty; but, although not a shot had missed hitting the animals, the latter continued to gallop on, as though none of them had been hurt! Before the hunters could reload, they had the mortification to see the whole band far off upon the prairie, and running as briskly as ever!

Seeing that there would be no chance to come up with them again, they all turned

their horses, and commenced riding back to make sure of the one which Basil had knocked over by his first shot. He was still in the valley they knew, and as they had all seen him lying prostrate, they felt certain they had secured one at least, and that was all they wanted.

On reaching the ridge that overlooked the valley, what was their surprise to see the buffalo once more upon his feet, and surrounded by a score of snapping, snarling wolves! These were rushing upon him from all sides at once; while the wounded bull was turning briskly about, and endeavouring to keep them at bay with his horns. Some of the wolves were seen stretched out on the ground—to all appearance dead—while their companions kept up the attack with unrelenting fury. The eyes of the buffalo flashed fire, as, wheeling round and round, he endeavoured to keep his assailants in front of him.

It was evident, however, that the wolves were gaining upon him; and, had they been left to themselves, would soon have brought him down. Our hunters at first thought of allowing them to accomplish this feat; when all at once it occurred to them that, if they did so, the skin might be spoiled! The wolves with their fierce teeth would tear it to pieces. This thought decided them upon a different plan; and all three galloped down the ridge and out into the meadow—surrounding the buffalo as they came up. The wolves scattered in every direction; and the great bull, now perceiving his new enemies, commenced rushing from one to the other, endeavouring to carry their horses upon his horns. It was with great difficulty that they could keep out of his reach; but at length another well-directed shot from Basil’s rifle entered the heart of the animal; and, after balancing himself upon his spread limbs, and rocking awhile from side to side, the huge creature fell forward upon his knees and lay motionless, with a stream of blood pouring from his lips. In a few moments he was dead!

Death of the Buffalo Bull

Having made sure of this, our hunters flung themselves from their horses, drew their

skinning-knives, and made up to the noble quarry. You may fancy their astonishment as well as chagrin, when, upon getting close to the animal, they discovered that what they had taken for a white buffalo was no white buffalo after all, but a black one painted white! Neither more nor less. The thing was too plain. The lime-like coating which covered the huge animal all over was now apparent; and as they passed their hands through the long hair, a white substance resembling pulverised chalk came off upon their fingers!

What could have caused the strange phenomenon, they asked one another. But the explanation was soon found. They remembered the gypsum hills over which they had ridden on the preceding day. They remembered, too, that it had rained in the night. The buffaloes had been among these hills; and, according to their usual habit, had rolled and wallowed about in the wetted dust-heaps. The white, alabaster-like mud had adhered to their skins—thus giving them the colour which had so much deceived and mystified our hunters!

“Well,” exclaimed Basil, giving a kick to the body of the dead bull, “even black buffalo is not so bad after all. At the worst we shall have fresh meat for dinner; and with that let us console ourselves for the disappointment.”

So saying, Basil made signs to his brothers to assist; and all three set about preparing to skin the animal.

Chapter Thirty Five.

The Mysterious Wallet.

That day our hunters dined, for the first time, on fresh buffalo-beef. After dinner they were not idle, but spent the remainder of the evening in drying a portion of the meat over a fire. They had resolved to encamp on the spot for the night, and follow up the trail in the morning. They therefore busied themselves, until a late hour, in preparing as much broiled buffalo-meat as would last them for several days.

It was near midnight before they thought of retiring to rest. As they had done upon like occasions before, it was agreed that one should keep watch—so as to keep off the wolves from the meat—while the other two slept.

Their camp was in the open ground, near the spot where the buffalo had been skinned. At a little distance off their animals were browsing upon the grass. The wolves were in great force—both prairie-wolves, and those of the large grey species. The scent of the broiling meat had attracted them from afar; and throughout the night they kept up a continuous howling, trotting all over the meadow around the camp.

François kept the first watch, and Lucien the second; Basil's turn came next, and it was to extend till daybreak, when all were to be aroused—so that they might pack up at a very early hour, and continue the journey. They did not wish to lose a moment more than was necessary—as they knew that every hour the migrating herd would be gaining upon them, and thus prolong the pursuit.

Basil's watch was a long one; and, having sat up so late, he felt sleepy. He was, therefore, in no very friendly humour with the wolves—upon whose account he was thus compelled to keep awake. Every now and then, as he saw them sneaking about in the darkness, he could not help muttering an angry ejaculation; and he had made up his mind, as soon as morning came, to empty his gun at one of the pack, by way of satisfying his feelings.

After a spell of watching, that lasted nearly three hours, he perceived the first streaks of dawn in the east.

"By the time we get breakfast cooked," thought Basil, "there will be light enough to follow the trail; so I'll rouse Frank and Luce; and, by way of a change, I'll give them a reveille with my rifle. Let me pick out the largest of these sneaking wolves; I'll put one of them at least from keeping anybody awake hereafter, I guess."

Basil, as he reflected thus, raised himself upon his knees, and looked around to

select a victim. Strange to say, the wolves, as if they had guessed his intention, had scattered away from the neighbourhood of the fire, though several could still be seen stealing along the edge of the willows. Basil chose one of these which appeared in the dim light to be a large grey one; and, levelling his piece, fired at it. As he was not very anxious whether he killed the animal or not, he fired carelessly.

Following the shot there was heard a loud scream, that was answered by fifty others, from all sides of the valley. It awoke the sleeping hunters; who, along with Basil, sprang to their feet. It was not the scream of wolves they had heard, but a cry of far different import. It was the yell of human voices—the war-cry of Indians!

All three stood speechless with terror; but, even could they have spoken, there was scarcely time allowed them to have uttered a word; for, almost simultaneous with the yells, there was a rushing forward of dark forms; and the next moment fifty tall savages were around them. Basil, who had been farthest out from the fire, was knocked senseless by a blow; while Lucien and François, who did not think of using their guns, were seized by the brawny arms of the Indians and held fast. It was fortunate for them that they did not make any resistance, else the savages would have killed all three upon the spot. As it was, even, they seemed for a while undetermined whether to do so or not—as it was one of their number that Basil had mistaken for a wolf, and the shot had wounded the Indian, which, of course, exasperated them greatly. Perceiving, however, the small force of the party, and that the boys made no farther resistance, they gave up the idea of killing them on the spot, but bound the arms of all three behind their backs; and then, after having mounted them on their horses, and gathered up their guns and blankets, led them out of the valley. At a short distance off, the Indians reached a spot where their own horses were tied. Here they halted for a moment—until each had got into his saddle—and then the whole party, prisoners and all, set off at a brisk trot over the prairie.

In about an hour they arrived at a large encampment upon the bank of a broad shallow river. There were nearly an hundred lodges standing upon the plain; and the ground was littered with buffalo-horns and hides, while vast quantities of the flesh of these animals were hanging from poles in front of every lodge. There were fires, and camp-kettles, and dogs, and Indian ponies, and women, and children—all mixed up together, or moving to and fro among the tents.

In front of the encampment, and near the bank of the stream, the prisoners were thrown upon the ground. Their captors left them; but they were at once surrounded by a crowd of yelling squaws and children. These at first regarded them only with curiosity; but as soon as they heard that one of the Indians had been wounded, they uttered the most hideous and piercing cries, and approached their captives with threatening looks and gestures. They commenced their cowardly torture by pulling the ears and hair of the boys, and sticking arrow-points into their arms and shoulders; and then, by way of having a little fun, several of the squaws seized hold of, and dragged the three prisoners out into the middle of the stream. Here they ducked them, keeping their heads for a long time under water, all the while yelling and laughing like so many demons. The poor captives for a while believed that these women were about to drown them, and, tied as they were, they could make no effort to save themselves. This, however, was not the intention of the squaws; they were only disposed to have as much fun out of them as possible. After they had got tired of this amusement, they dragged the boys back again to the bank, and flung them dripping upon the grass.

But what was Basil doing all this time? Did he not possess a charm about him, that would have put an end to all this torturing treatment, and have made the Indians friends instead of such cruel enemies? Ah! poor Basil! he had suffered worse than any of the three. I shall tell you how it was with him.

At their capture Basil had been stunned by the blow of a tomahawk. He had been

knocked quite senseless; and although he recovered himself so far as to be able to ride to the Indian camp, it was not until after the ducking he received in the cold river that he fairly came to himself. As soon as he did so, he bethought himself of that which he carried under the breast of his hunting-shirt. In fact, his brothers had been reminding him of it every moment, anxiously entreating him to make use of a secret of which neither of them fully understood the nature. But, up to this time, Basil, bewildered by the blow, was scarcely conscious of what he did. He had now recovered himself, and was making every effort to get at the string, and draw the embroidered pouch from his breast; but his hands were tied behind him, and he could not use them! He essayed to reach it with his mouth, but all his efforts were in vain. He then turned towards his brothers, so that they might stretch forward and draw out the string with their teeth. They were no longer near him! The squaws had dragged them to some distance off; and, like himself, their ankles were tied together, and they could not move from the spot where they had been placed.

Basil saw all this with a feeling of consternation; for, judging from the cruel treatment to which they had been submitted, and from the excited and exasperated manner of the Indians, he began to fear the worst, and to doubt whether the charm he carried might, after all, avail them. He used every effort to give it a trial. Failing to reach it, he made signs to the squaws around him, nodding with his head, and casting his eyes downward towards his breast. These, however, did not understand his meaning; and only laughed at what appeared to them a somewhat comic pantomime.

During the continuance of this scene, the Indian men stood apart, conversing together, and evidently deliberating what they should do with their prisoners. The manner of some of them was angry and excited. They talked loudly, and gesticulated with violence, occasionally pointing to a spot of level ground in front of the camp. The captives could see that among these loud talkers was the man whom Basil had wounded, as he carried his arm in a bandage. He was an ill-favoured,

ferocious-looking savage; and the boys, although they knew not a word that was uttered, could tell by his manner that he was speaking against them. To their consternation, they at length saw that he and his party had carried their point, and all the others appeared to acquiesce. What could their decision have been? Were they going to murder them? Agonised with these terrible apprehensions, the boys watched every action of the Indians with the keenest solicitude.

All at once each one of the savages was seen to arm himself with a bow; while two of their number, carrying a large stake, proceeded out into the open ground, and planted it firmly in the earth. O God! the horrid truth now became clear. It was their intention to tie their prisoners to the stake, and use them as a target for their arrows! The boys had heard that this was a common custom among Indians with their captives; and each of them uttered a cry of terror, as they recognised the fearful preparations.

They had but little time to shout to each other; and what they said was drowned by the yells of the squaws and children, who leaped and danced over the ground, evidently delighted with the prospect of the horrid spectacle they were about to witness.

Fortunately Basil was selected as the first victim. His superior size and age, no doubt, obtained him that preference. He was rudely seized by a pair of Indians and dragged up to the stake, where the savages commenced stripping him—by way of making a better mark of his naked body!

As soon as they had loosened his arms and pulled off his hunting-shirt, the embroidered pouch attracted their attention. One of them seized it, and drew forth its contents—which proved to be a pipe-head of the red clay-stone—the celebrated steatite. As soon as the savage set his eyes upon it, he uttered a strange exclamation, and handed it to his companion. The latter took it into his hands, uttered a similar ejaculation, and carrying it with him, ran back to the crowd. These, as soon as it

reached them, could be seen passing it from hand to hand, each examining it minutely, and making some remark; but one Indian, more than the rest, seemed to be excited upon beholding it; and this one, after he had gazed upon it for a moment, ran hurriedly towards Basil, followed by all the others!

This was the opportunity which Basil wished for; and as the Indian stood in front of him, and pointed to the pipe, as if waiting for an explanation, the boy, his hands being now free, deliberately and with coolness made several signs which had been taught him by his father. These signs were at once understood by the Indian, who sprang forward, pulled off the cords that bound Basil's ankles, raised him to his feet, embracing him as he did so with friendly exclamations! All the other Indians now pressed forward, and grasped him by the hand, while some ran to Lucien and François, who, in a few moments, were likewise set free!

All three were now carried to one of the tents; dry clothes were put upon them, and as soon as it could be got ready, a feast was set before them: so that their captors, who but the moment before were about to put them one by one to a most cruel death, now seemed to strive with each other which should honour them the most! The Indian, however, who had shown so much interest at seeing the mysterious pipe-head, was allowed to take precedence in waiting upon them; and it was into his tent that our adventurers had been carried.

You will by this time wonder what there could be in a simple pipe-head, to have caused all this sudden and mysterious effect. I will tell you in as few words as possible.

You have no doubt heard of the celebrated Shawano chief Tecumseh—perhaps the greatest Indian warrior that ever lived, as well as the most remarkable of Indian statesmen. You may have heard, too, that during the last war between England and the United States, Tecumseh, taking advantage of the difference between these nations, endeavoured to excite the Indians to a general rising, for the purpose of

driving all white men from the soil of America. Tecumseh had a brother, Elswatawa, better known by the name of “the Prophet.” This brother was to the full as enthusiastic as the chief himself in the wish to carry out their great design; and for this purpose he undertook a crusade to every tribe of Indians in the western parts of America. He was a man of great talents and eloquence, and was received with friendship wherever he went. The cause which he advocated was dear to all Indians; and of course he was listened to, and smoked the calumet with the men of every tribe. Now this very calumet, which had been used by the Prophet throughout all his wanderings, was the identical one which Basil carried, and which, by its strange carvings and hieroglyphics, was at once recognised by these Indians, who were of the Osage tribe,—one of those which the Prophet had visited.

But you will ask, how this calumet came into the possession of Basil’s father, and why its possession insured such mysterious protection to our adventurers. That I can also explain. Tecumseh was killed in the war with the Americans; but the Prophet lived for many years afterwards. Shortly after having emigrated to America, during one of his excursions near Saint Louis, the Colonel—the father of our boy hunters—met with this strange Indian; and, through some circumstances which happened, the Frenchman and he became fast friends. Presents were exchanged between them, and that which was received by the latter was the red calumet. The Prophet, on giving it, told the Colonel, that if ever he should have occasion to wander among the Indian tribes, it might prove useful to him; and at the same time initiated him into certain signs which he was to make use of in such time of need. In these signs the Colonel had instructed Basil, and we have already witnessed their effect. The Indian who had best understood them, and in whom they had produced the strongest emotions, happened to be a Shawano himself—one of that very tribe to which both the Prophet and Tecumseh belonged; and which is now but a remnant—most of its warlike sons being either dead, or scattered among the nomad bands that roam over the great western prairies. Such, then, was the history of the

red calumet, which had proved the protector of our adventurous hunters.

In a short time they were enabled to communicate with the Indians by signs; for no people can understand such language better than Indians. The boys informed the Shawano who they were, and for what purpose they had ventured upon the prairies. On learning the nature of their expedition, the Indians were filled with astonishment as well as admiration for the courage of these young hunters. They told the latter, in return, that they themselves were out hunting the buffaloes—that they were now on the skirts of the great herd, and they believed that one or two white buffaloes had been seen. Furthermore, they added, that if the boys would remain, and hunt for a few days in company with them, no pains should be spared to kill or capture one of these animals, which should be placed at the disposal of their young guests. Of course, this invitation was cheerfully accepted.

I might narrate many more adventures that befell our Boy Hunters; but I fear, young reader, you are already tired of the prairies. Suffice it, then, to say, that after some days spent in hunting with the Indians, a white buffalo was at length killed, his skin taken off in the proper manner, and, after being saturated with a preserving ointment, which Lucien had brought along with him, was carefully packed upon the back of the mule Jeanette. Our adventurers now bade farewell to their Indian friends, and set out on their return homewards. They were accompanied to the confines of Louisiana by the Shawano and several other Indians, who there took leave of them. In due time they safely reached the old house at Point Coupée; where I need not tell you they met with a joyous and affectionate welcome, both from their father and the ex-chasseur, Hugot. The old naturalist had gained what he wished for, and was as happy as man could be. He was prouder than ever of his boy-men—his “young Nimrods,” as he now called them—and on many a winter’s night by the cheerful log-fire, did he take pleasure in listening to the story of their adventures in search of a white buffalo.

The End.

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