



FAR OUT:
ROVINGS RETOLD.

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BY

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NORTH LAND," ETC., ETC.

— for wide expand
Beneath the wan stars and descending moon,
Islanded seas, blue mountains, mighty streams,
Dim tracts and vast, robed in the lustrous gloom
Of leaden-coloured even, and fiery hills
Mingling their flames with twilight on the verge
Of the remote horizon.

SHELLEY

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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.



I HAVE been told that an introductory chapter is necessary ere the scattered papers of travel which are here brought together can be taken from the lower region of magazine literature, in which they have hitherto had existence, and, with a title bestowed upon them, be elevated or “shelved” into the upper world of books.

I feel convinced, however, that no amount of preface, introductory chapter, or other preparatory preamble could succeed in imparting topographical sequence or literary unity to rambles, the theatres of which have lain so far removed from each other.

To group together such separated scenes as the pine-woods and snow-sheeted lakes of the regions of the Hudson’s Bay fur-trade with the treeless plains of Natal and the Dutch Republics, would be a task beyond even the focussing faculty of my old fishing friend, John Burns, of Derry-cluny. Burns was frequently in the habit of expatiating upon the

advantages of climate enjoyed by those who breathed the air of his native river bank, whose salmon pools and streams he knew so well. On one occasion when I had succeeded in dragging my bones out of the Gold Coast, less many stone weight of their normal covering, the old fisherman came to see me. There was, he said, only one thing necessary to insure perfect restoration to health and strength. It was to sit every day upon the battlement of a bridge over his river, and to breathe the air that blew down from the Glen of Aherlow.

“Had not Father Maher, the Coadjutor, been to Rome, Asia Minor, and them northern parts, and didn't he give it up, for goodness, to the air on Ballycarron Bridge?” This “isothermal line” of my poor old friend comes back now to me when I try to bind together Shasta and Athabasca, and them “southern parts” of Africa; but unless my readers can be induced to adopt some such method of geographical grouping, and to make a “bee line” across the globe, these divergent paths of “Far Out” travel must still remain sundered by space of seas.

Taking the papers in the order in which they were written, that of South Africa comes first. Of the paper itself I will only remark that, although a wild storm of conflict has swept over South Africa since that date, I find no cause to alter a single opinion or reverse a judgment then expressed. A recent well-known

traveller visiting the Diamond Fields thought he had discovered in the fact of black labour there given to white employers the key to the pacific solution of the great difficulties between race. To my mind the great pit at Kimberley had an exactly opposite tendency. It brought to South Africa the white race of gold-seekers; it brought to Kimberley the black race of gun-seekers. Greed and passion on the one hand; arms and ammunition on the other; the spark could not be distant.

Who rightly gauged the situation can best be answered by the host of little wars, which in four years have cost the empire about nine millions sterling. As it has fallen to my lot in life to have seen a good deal of native races in different parts of our vast empire, I may here devote a few words to this question of native war—a question which, if the moral matter contained in it should in these days be looked upon as old-fashioned and out of date, may at least claim notice from the fact of the “big bill” which usually follows a “little war.”

One of the effects of living in what is called a rapid age is, that although we have multiplied our sources of information on all subjects almost beyond computation, our time and opportunities of studying those sources of information have not increased.

People have no leisure now to inquire into an injustice. Men grow quickly tired of the whole subject.

They do not want the trouble of sifting or weighing a question; the novelty, even of an unjust war, soon wears off, and the readers of daily papers become more intent upon getting rid of a worry, that has bored themselves, than of redressing some wrong that has been inflicted upon others.

“There is nothing more easy,” said a veteran Cape statesman to the writer, “than to get up a war in South Africa. If I had only known that the Government wanted such things, I could have given them a score of Kaffir wars in my time.”

He spoke the soberest truth. A wild or semi-wild man is always ready to fight if wrong be put upon him. It is the only method of obtaining redress or vengeance that he knows of. He has no means of separating the acts of irresponsible white men from the government under which they live. The only government he can understand is that personal rule which makes the chief and the subject alike answerable; and hence every trader carries with him, in his dealings with natives, the character of the nation to which he belongs. Yet wherever I have gone, among wild or semi-wild men, I have found one idea prevalent in the minds of white men trading with natives. That idea was that it was perfectly fair and legitimate to cheat the wild man in every possible way.

One hundred years ago it was considered right to cheat the black man out of his liberty and to sell

him as a slave. To-day it is the natural habit of thought to cheat the black man out of his land or out of his cattle. In the coast region of Natal the coin known as a florin is called among the natives "a Scotch half-crown." The reason of the title is simple. A few years ago an enterprising North-Briton went to trade with the natives in that part of the country. He did not barter—he paid cash for what he bought. Curiously enough he always tendered half-crowns in payment. Months later the natives found that their half-crowns were worth only two shillings each; and since that time the florin, along the coast, bears the name of "Scotchman." Instances of a similar kind could be multiplied, until the reader would be tired of their iteration.

As the widest rivers have their sources in rills, so have our wars frequently their beginnings in the state of petty theft and retaliation thus produced. A native is cheated in trade; he discovers the fraud, and later on commits a theft in retaliation. Instantly the Colony rings with the outrage. The news is quickly taken up by that large class of idler, loafer, transport-rider, trader—persons to whom war brings a harvest of gold, and with whom, in all parts of the world, war will ever be popular. The position becomes what is called "strained," and then there is only needed a Governor, hungry for the addition of letters to his name, to let loose the tide and begin a little

war, which costs Great Britain four hundred or five hundred pounds for every negro shot.

Here is the history of a little war, the bill for which still remains to be paid. A "commando" was sent out against a chief, who had given trouble on the frontier. It is easy to mistake the cattle and women belonging to one black man, for the cattle and women belonging to another. The wives and property of the recalcitrant negro could not be found, but a "commando" is not the kind of expedition to return empty-handed from a campaign, so the women and cattle of another black man or tribe were triumphantly seized. As those people had lived on terms of perfect amity with the white man, it may be supposed the seizure caused astonishment. The men of the tribe fell, without hesitation, upon the nearest white man they could find—an old trader—and killed him and his sons. War was of course declared, to punish this unprovoked murder, and the little conflict thus inaugurated cost Great Britain a quarter of a million sterling. I have no hesitation in saying that five-sixths of our African wars, and a still larger proportion of the Indian wars in America, have their beginnings in wrongs done in the first instance by white men upon natives.

To the incoming settler the land of his adoption is essentially a *new* land. There may have been people in it for twenty centuries before he came to

it ; but their rights to possession are not perceptible to him. His title to land in the country often consists in the fact of his voyage out, and in the other fact that he never had any land in his own country. It is curious how easy it is to transfer to a fresh soil the seed of an injustice. Denied the possession of the soil in his old home, the first thought of the immigrant in the land of his adoption is to deny to others the right to exist. Too often, having had only the right to labour for others allowed him in England, he eagerly adopts the idea that labour is the natural inheritance of the black man. So it is ever in the world. The man beaten and bullied in his youth will beat and bully when his opportunity arrives—the servant is ever the hardest taskmaster. “There is,” says Balzac, “nothing more terrible than the vengeance of the shopkeeper.” Thus the frontier between civilisation and the wilds finds ever arrayed along it, whether the scene be the backwoods of Canada, the Dakotan boundary, or the outlying “veldt” in the Transvaal, representatives of the two races least likely to agree together—the white man who has never had a servant, and the black man who has never known a master.

I recollect once spending a couple of days in the pursuit of a bear in a western Canadian forest. I had as guide a white trader, a man from a neighbouring forest settlement. We chanced to meet one

day a solitary Indian hunter. My companion shook his fist and cursed aloud at him.

“What harm has he done you?” I asked.

“Harm?” answered the man; “he’ll never stop until he has killed that bear. I wouldn’t leave a red-skin in the land if I had my way.”

“But the bear is as much his property as it is ours,” I said. “Probably for twenty generations back the red ancestors of that poor devil have hunted bears in this forest.” What cared my guide? He was quite as ready to put down the “red-skin” as though the scene had been an English Petty Sessions Court, the Indian had been a rabbit poacher, and he himself the presiding magistrate. In the Sierra Nevadas, in California, I had once the good fortune of meeting the late Mr. Ross Browne, for years an Indian Government Commissioner. From him I heard the history of the origin of the Apachée War, which has so long been waged in the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico. “When the first coach line was put through Arizona,” said my informant, “the Indians were at complete peace with us; they watched the horses at the *ranches*, they were employed in the stables, and did the work of the road cheerfully and well. All went smoothly for some time until there came upon the line a certain Mr. King. This gentleman was not at all pleased with the peaceable manner in which the busi-

ness was proceeding. The Indians were doing the work cheaply; the stations were supplied at small cost; no money could be made out of such a set of inoffensive people. King determined to change all this, and to make the country fit for an American speculator to live in. His mode of procedure was very simple. Hard by the *ranche* at which he dwelt there was an old fort of the Mexican times, whose *adhoby* battlements were weed-grown and ruined. Within some crumbling bastion there lay an old iron carronade, rusting amid the nettles. This forgotten relic of Spanish dominion was the instrument by which Mr. King was to effect the change he wished for. He brought the gun out of the ruins, he scraped the mud from the muzzle, cleared the vent-hole, and squibbed off some loose powder to see that all was right within the bore. Then he placed the gun in a neighbouring thicket, mounted upon two trunks of timber, and with its muzzle just hidden within the edge of brushwood. Down that muzzle he put a bag of gunpowder, and on top of the powder he placed several handfuls of leaden bullets—twelve to the pound. When he had completed the priming of his piece he laid the sight of the gun upon the centre of a little depression in the ground that lay about one hundred and fifty yards distant; then, to keep the gun in its place, he put another log of timber across it. All this done, he quietly covered up his ord-

nance with a sheet, and went his way. An hour later he issued invitations among the Indians for a feast on the morrow. He would kill three oxen; there would be three fires, at which the oxen would be roasted, and then there would be a great feed and much jollity. The oxen were killed, the fires made, the guests were not wanting. About mid-day the following day there were over two hundred Apachées busily engaged in roasting meat at three large fires. The fires stood in a single line in a slight hollow, the floor of which was level, and which level was continued to a small thicket distant from it about one hundred and fifty yards.

“When the feast was at its height, and the Indians were thickly grouped around the fires, roasting, eating, running back to roast, and then to eat again, Mr. King quietly left the crowd and sauntered up into the thicket. No one minded him; every one was too eager at the feast. All at once the roar of an explosion burst out from the thicket, and then—there is no need to tell the rest; dead and mangled Indians lay thick in the hollow. No one knew what had happened; but when, later on, other Indians flocked wildly to the scene, they found two-thirds of their comrades dead or dying, a score or more wounded with different degrees of severity, and some twelve or more untouched, but utterly dazed and stupified at the catastrophe. They could only point to the thicket; the iron

carronade told the rest. It was found lying some distance back in the wood, flung there by the force of its own recoil. A black mark along the ground showed where a train of gunpowder had been laid to the vent. Of Mr. King there was no trace; he was already far away towards the nearest fort. But from that day to the present the Indians have been ceaselessly on the war trail, and over the sandy wastes of Arizona and New Mexico many a site is marked to-day with the stone, or cross, which tells the traveller that a white man there met his end at the hands of an Apachée."

It may be easily supposed that, when the stage of actual conflict has been reached, the mode of warfare springing from such a condition of society is utterly destitute of any of those rules which civilisation endeavours to impose upon strife. There is literally no line drawn in the savagery of war with the native. There is no "belt," in reality or in metaphor, beneath which it is unfair to hit a black man. Between the Irish wars of Elizabeth's captains and the wars waged against the natives in South Africa there is only the difference of breechloaders, and rifled ordnance; civilisation is alone traceable in the greater range of the projectile or the increased power of the explosive. The old methods of destruction are as much in favour as ever, but they are left to the nimbler feet or more active hands of our Fingo or Basuto allies.

It would be unfair to our colonial brethren to suppose that they are responsible for the savagery of acts done by what are termed "irregular corps" in native wars. In the ranks of many of those regiments the concentrated rascality from half the states of Europe will be found. Here is a little picture from a corps raised for service in one of the recent South African wars.

When visiting his sentries at night, the Commanding Officer was in the habit of taking round with him an orderly, who carried a lantern. There was, of course, nothing unusual in this fact; but the method of the inspection had best be told in the officer's own words. "I knew my blackguards wanted to shoot me," he said, "so, as I walked along the line of sentries, I took care to keep the fellow with the lantern on my right or left-hand side. When challenged, I would call out, and then jump quickly to one side, so that if the rascal on sentry fired, he would have aimed at the light and missed me."

And yet it is to men such as this corps was composed of that the nation freely pays six times a higher rate of daily wage than it gives to the trained troops of its regular army. Often, when I have seen the wild extravagance that characterises our "little wars," and looked at the rabble brought together, to harry some miserable negro and his tribe—

——to chase

Through rocks, where monkeys seemed a nobler race,

I have not known whom to pity most, the black man, hunted out of his land and life, or the white rate-payer at home, whose pocket was being so freely bled.

Let no man imagine either that for our own troops these wars have in them even the common attribute of "schooling." Sorry schools these to learn the steadiness, the discipline, or the *morale*, which would meet in a fair field of European fight the Pomeranian battalions, or the men who crossed the Balkans in mid-winter. "May it never be my fate," said, to the writer of these pages, one whose experience of troops in war ranged over every campaign of the last thirty years in all parts of the globe, "to find myself on a European battle-field with an army trained in a South African campaign." He was right. The cave-smokers of Algeria made but a sorry show when pitted against sterner stuff than Kabyle fugitives: yet Algeria was not the only part of Africa where cave-smoking warfare was widely practised, and where science coolly blew helpless women and children into atoms in the burrows to which they had fled in terror.

Let us quit this subject. If this were soldiering, it would indeed be only a sorry trade.

When the present Afghan war was in its initiative stages, we ventured to express a doubt upon the favourite theory of the "forward school," that the Afghans had only to be freely shot, plundered, and otherwise

knocked about, to become our fast and firm allies, and to hate the Russians with something of the discriminating fervour of a London music-hall audience. As the best method of stating these views we had recourse to the past history of the Afghan people, and of our own relations towards them, concluding the attempt to prove the moral of the moment, by the lesson of the past, with these words: "Twenty millions of money! twenty thousand human lives! three times that number of camels and horses lost! a name hated throughout the length and breadth of this mountain land—such were the results accruing to us from three years' wandering in search of a scientific frontier."

Whether history has since repeated itself to almost every syllable of the above sentence we must let our readers determine. Meantime I will leave these subjects and turn to other lands which are filled with brighter sights and softer sounds—with the echo of the wilderness, the ring of dog-bells over snowy solitudes, the splash of canoe-paddle in quiet waters; with sights of suns setting over measureless meadows, of moons glistening upon snow-sheeted lakes, of the weird lights of the north flashing above motionless pine-trees—sights and sounds of all that varied north land which through time and distance wears ever unchanged its memories of lonely beauty.

Of the dog, whose fortunes had so close a connection

with mine own through many scenes of winter travel, there remain a few words to be written.

It may be remembered that in the spring of 1873 his career as a hauling dog ceased, and that in the autumn of the same year he became a dog of civilisation, if not of progress. Henceforth life was to be to him a time of rest and food. The collar and the moose-skin trace could only visit him in troubled dreams. No more the early call to harness in the savage cold of the dark morning would break upon his sleeping ear as he lay deep beneath the falling snow. No more the long day tugging at the collar, the mid-day halt, the frozen white fish for supper, the shivering bivouac under the pine-trees—all was changed, his work was over; and, like some old veteran of a hundred fights in the seclusion of his club, thenceforth he could lay down his body for himself and the law for his friends, and beguile the tedium of time in the pursuit of small game, or devote himself to pastimes which would recall earlier scenes of life in the great northern wilderness. As time went on that aversion which he had demonstrated towards cats on his first introduction to civilisation deepened into a more lasting animosity. Perhaps they seemed to him a link that bound him to older enmities—enmities to the lynx and the marten, the beaver and the otter, the pursuit of which had in bygone times so often caused him moments of excitement; for how often had I seen him

baffled by a marten up a pine-tree, or intensely puzzled by the sudden disappearance of a fisher into a burrow, down which he would intrude his head as far as it was possible for it to go, while his great body drew in deep respirations of sand and air, as though he would draw the animal from his earth by mere strength of inhalation. Frequently too was he noticed to indulge in hole-digging of a desultory description, the object whereof was not apparent. It may have been that the old dog was affected at the memory of the many *caches* he had made during his life of travel—those never revisited hiding-places of superfluous food scattered along his ten thousand miles of winter work; and perhaps a vague idea possessed him that, burrowing at random, he might find some long-hidden treasure of moose-leg, white fish, or buffalo-bone. It is impossible to say whether he was happy or not, for happiness in dogs, as well as in their masters, is a quantity that cannot always be measured by the weight or value of their creature comforts. Dog comfort he undoubtedly possessed—dog comfort of the bed and the bone; but who shall say that there came not now and again to his brain old memories of cozy camps on pine islets in great frozen lakes, of mid-day halts by snow-drifts where the red and golden willows glistened in the winter's sun, of old antagonists and fellow-haulers, of the hosts of Muskeymotes, Cariboos, Tête-Noirs, Kuskytayatimoos, that had been boon com-

panions, or fierce rivals, to him in the fur forts of the north? Glimpses, too, of idle moments in those far-away forts of the great wilderness when he bayed the Northern Lights that flashed and flickered over the pine-tops on the opposite shore, or answered back at intervals the lonely howl of some wandering wolf against the clear cut sky-line of a moonlit prairie hill.

Once again dog and master were destined to meet. Three years had passed since they parted on the Atlantic shore of North America. Since that time the world had changed much with both of them. Ease and age had bowed the sharp head, bent the broad back, uncurled the bushy tail, and slouched the springy gait of the once unequalled Esquimaux. Toil and the fever of the African forest had left their trace upon the man. It had been night when they had parted; it was also night when they met again. For a moment the old dog seemed to be puzzled; he had been roused from sleep to meet the new comer, but when his ear caught voice and words that had been so familiar to him, memories of the old time seemed to come back, for the bent tail wagged, the lip curled into the laugh, and the well-remembered whimper of satisfaction sounded again—echoes of old companionship of camp and trail in a far-off world.

Two years more and echoes, if such they were, ceased. In the summer of 1878, *Cerf Vola* the Untiring made his last camp on the shore of life. His grave is

under a pine-tree, although far away from the land of pines; and, if it be given to the dog spirit to roam again the scenes of life, he has for his "happy hauling grounds" a wondrous heaven—a murmur of many waters, an echo of ever-sounding pine-trees, and many glimpses of that vast world of wilderness—lake, forest, prairie, and mountain, "far out" beyond the white man's farthest farm.