

FAR OUT:
ROVINGS RETOLD.



A DOG AND HIS DOINGS.

I.

FAR out, in that portion of the grim Laurentian wilderness of North America which stretches its iron belt between the more recent formation of the Bay of Hudson and the valley of the Mackenzie River, there lies a sheet of water named Deer's Lake by the old English fur-traders, who first reached its shores from the estuary of the Churchill River.

It is essentially a lonely place; the rocky shores, broken into deep and quiet bays, hold a vegetation of fir and spruce trees, dwarf, rigid, and of dark sombre hue. The waves beat in monotonous cadence against the bare rocks which mark the "points" or capes between the deep indentations of the shores; and the bays are often filled with long growing reeds and

waving grasses, through which the wind makes ceaseless moan, as early autumn follows with rapid footsteps the September sun.

In summer, short though it be, there are sights to be seen on this lake, filled with that rare beauty only to be found where the rain and the sun have together and alone woven the covering of the earth; for in summer there falls upon these hills the strange, unwonted beauty of saffron sunsets, lengthening out the shadows of dark pine-trees on water so still that the ripple from a wild duck's breast steals far over the surface, and gently rocks the shadowed image of the shore, and waves the motionless pine-branch on the cliff, and dies in the water-worn hollows of the old grey rocks with an echo just audible in the great stillness of the scene; then, too, as the light of evening deepens, and the western end of some long arm of the lake yet lives in the strange contrast of dark rigid tree-tops, outlined against a lustrous after-glow, there sounds over lake and shore a cry, the vivid distinctness of which startles the echoes deep into the bosom of the woods. It is the wail of the loon—a wild and lonely call that tells the shy moose in his willow lair he may rise and seek his mate; that calls the dark-furred otter from his haunt beneath the rock to his nightly toil of fishing in the quiet pools where the fish glance like silver arrows in the moonlight; that signals to the grey owl that his time has come, too, to flit amid the dusky shadows; that tells wild beast and wild bird they

may set forth for feast, or love, or war, safe under the cover of the night, in their great home of the wilderness.

On the south shore of this lake there stands a small trading-house or "fort" of the Hudson Bay Company. It is the usual type of structure common throughout the fur country of the great north. Log-house and picket-fence, trading-store, and hut for half-breed servants, all alike built from the wood of the straight fir-tree, roofed with logs, covered with the bark of junipers, and made secure from the searching winds of winter by mud and moss stuffed tightly between the interstices of the logs.

In winter, house, fence, and hut lie deep drifted, amid snow piled high by storm; in summer, dogs stretch in lazy delight upon the sloping pathway between the picket-fence and the lake shore. A boat lies updrawn upon the beach; an Indian birch-bark canoe, turned downwards upon its face, lies near it. Far out upon the lake another canoe, a speck on the water, is seen coming from the further shore with some Indian family intent on trade; and around, over the palisades and roof-tops, in endless lines, the motionless and rigid pine-trees stand dark and changeless.

In fact, this fort at Deer's Lake differs not from a hundred other forts scattered over this great northern wilderness. Its aspect, life, people, boats, canoes, surroundings, are all the same; everything is alike here as elsewhere: everything, save one item, and

that one item is an important one—it is the dog. The dogs of Deer's Lake differ from other dogs in most of the forts of the great northern land.

Dogs, it is true, are fond of differing all the world over; but on this point of difference between dogs at Deer's Lake and dogs elsewhere in the north there is a notable distinction, and it is this—that while the dogs at the many fur forts further inland, the trading forts scattered over the vast basins of the Saskatchewan, Peace, and Athabasca Rivers, are a poor and wolf-like breed, those at Deer's Lake are remarkable for possessing a strength, size, and symmetry, a uniformity of colour and characteristic, stamping them at once as a distinct species which has developed into that perfection always attained by Nature when in the wild state she moulds her creatures to their own wants and purposes. The dogs are, in fact, of Esquimaux breed, a species of which it will be necessary to say a few words.

Around the wide circle of the Arctic Sea, on all northern shores of Europe, Asia, and America, that extraordinary race of human beings known as Esquimaux possess a breed of dogs unequalled for the value of the assistance they afford to their human masters. The Arab has his horse, the Indian his canoe, the Libyan his camel; but in the dog the dwarfed and hardy races of the frozen north possess an auxiliary more constant, more untiring, more useful, than any other thing of animate or inanimate nature the wide world over.

From northern Norway, along the cold slopes of Lapland and the White Sea, far into that unknown region where Russia's north-east cape stands the nearest continental outpost to the pole upon the earth; down along the wintry shores of the Lena and the wild Yakoutsk waste, to the Straits of Behring; and, again, into the regions of North America by the mouths of the three great rivers which seek the Arctic Ocean, until, sweeping around the wide Bay of Hudson, the line crosses to Greenland and ends on the east coast of that desolate island—all around the immense circle of this northern shore-line there is found a breed of dogs, differing in size, it is true, but closely identical in shape, habit, and characteristic.

When the scattered tribes of Esquimaux move east or west along the shores of their lonely realms, when the spring-time tells them to quit their snow-houses, and to set out upon their dreary quests of fishing, while yet the ice gives safe and ready means of travel; when early winter, closing in the dusky darkness upon the short summer, sends them again to their huts, the dog is ever there to haul his load of dried fish or musk-ox meat, of oily blubber or skin, of drift-wood or dried moss; of walrus-bone for spear-heads; of all the curious craft of kettle, axe, knife, arrow-head, and tent, which the Esquimaux fashions from the few rude materials flung to him by the sea, or grudgingly yielded by the inhospitable shore.

Deep-chested, broad-backed, long-woolled, clean-legged, sharp-nosed, pointed-eared, bright-eyed, with

tail close curled over back, in token of an everlasting good humour towards man and of fierce resentment to all outside dogs, the Esquimaux dog stands of his species the only animal which gives to his master the twofold service of horse and dog.

The lake called Deer's Lake, of which we have already spoken, is not many marches distant from the west shore of Hudson's Bay. Indians descending the Beaver or Churchill River can easily reach the fort which stands at its mouth, in the summer; and in winter, when the cariboo are plentiful along the belt of woods lying between Lake Athabasca and Hudson's Bay, stray parties of Indians move at times back and forward from Deer's Lake to Fort Churchill. Thus there has arisen an intercourse between the two stations, and as Fort Churchill is the most southerly point to which the Esquimaux come on the shores of the bay, it has fallen out that the dogs bartered by the Esquimaux have been carried inland to the post of Deer's Lake, and that around the palisades and huts of that remote establishment the burly forms and upraised tails of these best and truest Arctic travellers are to be seen.

Nearly a dozen years ago from this present time an event occurred at this post of Deer's Lake which, although it received neither comment nor chronicle at the moment, is still worthy of a passing notice in this record. It was only the birth of a dog. Beyond the fact that the event took place at the time I have indicated, little more is known; indeed, it may be

admitted that even that fact would for ever have remained in the limbo of unrecorded history, if circumstances had not occurred in the after-life of this dog which gave prominence to his earlier existence.

It may, however, be safely presumed that the earlier stages of puppyhood were passed by this dog in conditions of unusual felicity. Doubtless the year was one of plenty, so far as white fish in the lake was concerned, or the herds of reindeer were unusually numerous in the neighbouring woods; and doubtless, too, the mother of this dog was of a free and generous nature, who grudged not to her progeny a share in spoil of bone, or in the feast that followed the return of the lake-boat from the nets—an event usually watched with anxious eyes by the whole pack of dogs at a northern fur fort, who welcome with hilarious howl the grating of the keel upon the beach, sure prelude to a rich feast, if the night's yield has been propitious.

Thrown a chance wanderer in some of these remote and lonely posts in this wilderness of the north, it has often been my occupation to watch the habits of these dogs in the idle hours of their lives. Their fights and mutual jealousies, their impertinent intrusion into the provision sheds, their wolf-like howls when the earliest streak of dawn glimmered over the eastern hills, their joy when released from harness, their sorrow when about to be placed in it, have often filled up the moments of a day spent in one of those remote spots.

I remember once, at the fort called St. John's, on the Upper Peace River, being witness to a strange conflict between the instincts of a dam to her whelps and the cravings of her own hungry nature. She had become, by some fortunate chance, the possessor of a large bone ; this she had carried to a place of safety under my window, followed by her family of four puppies, just verging from the age of toddling to that of toothsome tendencies. The mother's gaunt sides and staring bones showed that the progeny were no easy burden to her, and their rounded and chubby figures contrasted strongly with her angular outline.

Nevertheless, the four youthful haulers seemed to be of opinion that it was wiser for them to claim a share in the bone now under discussion than to await a future moment when its sustenance might be derived second-hand from their maternal relative. They growled and tugged at the bone almost in the mouth of their hungry nurse, and rolled over each other and over the bone in a mixture of infantile ferocity and feebleness most laughable to look at. The expression of their mother's face was one of hungry perplexity. Here was a clear case of injustice on the part of the offspring: they still looked to her for support, and yet they also sought to share her support—this precious bone ; nay, they even presumed upon her feelings to rush in and take it by force, knowing that from her alone could they secure it without being severely bitten. Her only resource was in flight : raising the bone in her mouth, she tried to get away from her

family to eat it alone ; but they invariably toddled after her to renew again their importunities. A bright idea seemed suddenly to strike the brain of one of the puppies : he relinquished his attempts at the bone and devoted himself to his more legitimate province of deriving nourishment from his mother ; but I could not determine whether this manœuvre was only a ruse to detain her for the benefit of his three brethren yet struggling for the bone, or simply an effort to improve the occasion with reference to a "square meal" on his own account.

Arguing from these and similar scenes witnessed among dogs generally in the north, and having regard to the excellent proportion attained by the dog whose history began at Deer's Lake, I can safely aver that his mother must have been of a free and generous nature to him in his early youth. But whatever may have been the conditions of that earlier life, it must suffice for us to know that four winters of hauling and four summers of repose had passed over him ere fate determined that the name of the dog and his doings should fall upon the ear of the big outside world.

It was the winter of 1871.

For three months the great northern forest had lain prone beneath snow, ice, and bitter cold. Many a storm had swept over the immense waste, piling the dry snow into huge drifts by the banks of frozen rivers ; silting up willow islands, covering the wreck of fallen vegetation in the dark pine woods, and

moaning away into endless space over lake, and plain, and forest.

The scene is in the neighbourhood of the fur fort called Cumberland, on the shore of Pine Island Lake, near the lower Saskatchewan River. It is the hour of sunrise. Along the white bed of a tortuous river, fast frozen beneath five feet of ice, and deep drifted in snow, came three dog-trains; twelve dogs in all. Four men accompany or follow these trains in the rapid stride and long swing of snow-shoe walking. The bells upon the dog-harness ring and jangle clearly in the keen frosty air, for the thermometer is standing at some twenty-five degrees below zero. A white steam rises from the breaths of dogs and men, and great icicles hang on the beards of the travellers, whose fur caps are frosted over with ice dust fine as flour.

The pace is about four and a half miles an hour, and its rapid movement has done more to make the blood course freely through their bodies than capôte or mittaine or fur-cap could ever achieve on such a morning. Suddenly, from a bend in the river channel, there became visible on the left shore a solitary Indian wigwam; a thin column of smoke issues from the opening in the pointed roof, a dog barks vigorously toward the new comers from the bank in front; all at once the train dogs quicken their pace to a sharp trot, the men break into a run, and in a few minutes the sledges are abreast of the wigwam; then the leading dogs make a wild lurch to leave the river and ascend the bank, with a view to a rest, and perhaps

to a spell out of harness; but that is not to be, and a loud and stern word of command from the leading driver makes them crouch together in the dry yielding snow in the centre of the river.

The three men ascend the river bank and enter, one by one, on their hands and knees, the low opening of the Indian wigwam. The scene inside is a curious one. Through the opening in the roof the light comes fully in; a fire is burning on the ground in the centre; its smoke, only half escaping through the aperture above, hangs in the upper part of the tent, and it is only by sitting on the ground that one can escape its influence and see with ease and comfort. At the further side of the fire from the doorway sits an old withered, wrinkled Indian, who scarcely regards the new-comers, but continues to sing a low, monotonous song; a young woman and two children are squatted near.

The new-comers sit on some dried rushes around the fire; the old man, having shaken hands with them one by one, continues his dirge. The leader of the party asks his followers what the old man is singing about. "About the death of his son," they reply. "His son, this woman's husband, and the father of these two children died here two days since; and last night a dog-train came from the fort (Cumberland), and took the body away for burial in the graveyard there."

"And the man, who was he? What did he die of?" asked the leader of the party.

“He was a French half-breed who had adopted the Indian life, and he lived here in this wigwam, hunting for the family. He died of cold caught in chasing a black fox, which had carried away one of his traps. He was a good hunter.”

The story of this man's life and death was soon told; meantime the Indian continued his song.

“What is he singing?”

“He says that he is old and cannot hunt; that his support has gone from him; that it would be better if he went too.”

A few minutes later the party left the wigwam and continued their journey along the frozen river. There was now a trail on the ice, and the dogs followed it with rapid steps. Soon the river opened upon a large lake; the sleds bounded briskly over the hard drifted surface of the snow, which bore the trace of a recent dog-train upon it; then there appeared, far off in front, the misty outline of buildings grouped together on the dim opposite shore of the lake. Quicker went the dogs, faster beat and clanged the bells, until, leaving the ice, the dogs dragged their loads into an irregular open space surrounded by wooden houses, in the centre of which other dogs and men stood watching the new-comers.

Prominent amongst the dogs a large burly-figured, bushy-tailed animal at once caught the eye; he appeared to be intent upon combining two almost impossible lines of conduct in one and the same moment; namely, to ingratiate himself into the good

graces of the men of the party just come, and to intimidate by a series of quick but ferocious "asides" the new dogs. Thus he presented a singular contrast of solicitude and swagger; the upturned tail wagged to man and shook menace to beast almost at the same instant; the face by turns glared and grimaced, and the ground was trod by a sort of light springy motion, which indicated a desire to give his paw to anybody who might take the trouble to ask for it, or to show his jaw to any and every dog who looked in his direction.

There have been ingenious German artists who have succeeded in producing similar effects in the portraits of some of their great national heroes. Looked at from one side, the picture presents to the beholder the graceful outline of a ballet-dancer, or of a rustic maiden; regarded from the front, the lowering lineaments of Bismarck, the wrinkled ferocity of Moltke, or the Mosaic ramrodism of the German Emperor's face and figure strike grimly upon the eye. This, however, must be what is termed "high art"—in the case of the bushy-tailed dog at Cumberland Fort it can only be regarded as low nature. But to proceed.

The general appearance of this dog and his grotesque goings on quickly caught the eye of the leader of the party, and inquiries followed as to his name and ownership; these were soon answered. The dog was of pure Husky breed; he was born at Deer's Lake, three hundred miles further north; his owner

was one Isbister, a well-known trapper and traveller over a wide extent of country; he was but just returned from bearing his part in hauling the dead body of Joe Miller from the Indian wigwam; his name was *Cerf Volant*, or the Flying Deer.

Thus at Cumberland, on Pine Island Lake, was first introduced to the writer of these pages an animal destined hereafter to fill a prominent part in long and varied scenes of toil and travel. And now, having brought to a point of contact at the fur fort called Cumberland the life of this dog and of his future owner, it will be better for the smoothness of the narrative, and the truer weaving together of two threads of life, to continue our story in the personal pronoun.

I became the possessor of *Cerf Volant*. He was the "foregoer," or leader, of three other dogs, who bore the names of *Tigre*, *Muskeymote*, and *Cariboo*; the first a good and trusty hauler, the two others wild and shaggy dogs, of savage disposition and unkempt aspect.

The financial operation which resulted in transferring these dogs to my possession was of a nature to surpass all other operations of the kind ever known in the north—in other words, more money was on this occasion asked and given for this train of four dogs than the oldest inhabitant had ever remembered in similar transactions; but had that sum been three times what it was, and had that triple amount been demanded for the single "fore-

goer," Cerf Volant, exclusive of his three comrades, it would still have been an eligible investment, to be repaid afterwards with the interest of an amount of true and faithful service impossible to over-estimate.

The long journey, which had begun three months earlier, was, at the time we write of, drawing to a close. Five hundred miles yet remained to be traversed ere the point from which I had started in October would be again reached, and this distance, lying as it did for the most part over vast stretches of frozen lake, promised to be traversible without greater difficulty than that of cold and hardship; for, over these large lakes the very force and violence of the winds have made the mere labour of travel comparatively easy. The snow closely packed upon the ice forms a hardened surface, upon which the snow-shoe leaves but scant impression, and the dogs and sleds run lightly over the smooth and dazzling highway which cold and storm have laid across the vast spaces of these inland seas.

It was the 31st of January when I set out with my new train for this last stage of five hundred miles. The cold was very great; the country as desolate as frozen swamp, spreading in endless succession for eighty miles' distance, could make it; but the story of that journey has been already told in another place, and its introduction here is only necessary in order to carry on the history of the "foregoing" dog into times and through events which have found no record.

Twenty days passed away; the marsh and the lakes had been crossed. There had been days of bitter blast, and nights of still, cold rigour, and cosy camps on islands drifted deep in snow, where the tall pine-tree stood to shadow back the glow of the fire lit beneath it, and to shelter the wayfarers whose passing footsteps had broken, for one short night, the quiet of these lonely isles.

And now it was all over! I had got back again to house and fireside, bed and board. True, it was only four months since I had left these adjuncts of civilisation, but time in those matters has only a relative significance, and distance had so lengthened out the vista of these hundred and twenty days that it seemed half a lifetime had been spent in the wilderness.

I took up my quarters in an unoccupied house lying about six miles from Fort Garry, in order to quickly complete some official reports relative to my journey. I had as attendant an old pensioner; as companions my four dogs.

The pensioner dwelt in the kitchen, the dogs occupied a large stable. I had the rest of the house to myself. When not suffering from a too liberal allowance of Hudson's Bay rum, the pensioner was wont to devote his leisure moments in the evening to endeavouring to elucidate, with my assistance, some problems that perplexed him.

He had quitted the army and left England before the era of the introduction of electricity, and "them

themagruffs," as he used to term the telegraph, was ever a fruitful source of conversation with him. For the rest, he cooked for me and for the dogs, kept my fire alight, and fulfilled that truest of all services by leaving me to myself as often as I pleased. At times I gave the dogs a run over the snow, or put them in harness and ran them to the Fort for exercise or business.

But even the border civilisation of the Red River Settlement had many temptations for Cerf Volant and his comrades. There were some farmsteads in the neighbourhood of my house, and ducks and turkeys and a cock were things as completely beyond the comprehensions of my team as the telegraph had been puzzling to my attendant; with this difference, however—that while the old soldier lost his head over the mystery of the electric wire, the cock and his companions invariably lost their heads to my team's inability to comprehend their true functions in civilisation.

More than once was the mid-day scamper up the roadway in front of my house attended with wild scenes of flutter and confusion in straw-yard and byre into which my dogs had penetrated, and more than once were my repeated calls by name of each dog answered by the reappearance of these "missing links" between civilisation and savagery in a state of hilarious joy over the capture and decapitation of these puzzling poultry.

At last the time came to quit the settlement for

other and larger scenes of civilisation, into which the dogs could not go.

A Hudson's Bay officer about to start for Norway House, on the north shore of Lake Winnipeg, became the purchaser of the team and cariote, and Cerf Volant passed from my possession to resume his old place in a Hudson's Bay fort. I parted from the dog with keen regret: he stood alone among his comrades not only as a hauler but as a friend. The work of our lives is the real test of our natures. Any man can be jolly or good-tempered at his dinner, or during his leisure moments; but if the daily routine of his work leaves no frown upon his nature, if his heart does not close or harden beneath the hourly hammering of his toil, then you may swear there lurks no cranny of discontent in his being—there is no nook of selfishness in his heart. So was it with this dog. He alone was ever jolly at his post; he hauled through all the hours of a long day without slack of collar trace or stint of effort; but the ear was ever ready to turn responsive to a kindly call, the tail to wag a welcome within the tight-drawn traces of his toil; and when the evening came, and the collar was laid aside, and the last strap unbuckled, not lighter did he shake from him the dry powdery snow than the vestiges of his long day's work.

Companion in the camp, faithful servant during the day—what more could man desire?

The day of departure came. I drove through the single street of Winnipeg village on my way south.

At the entrance to the town, at the spot where, on the night of my first arrival eight months earlier, I had parted from my guide, to pursue alone the way to the friendly Indian settlement, I saw my dog-train coming at a brisk pace along the frozen road. Cerf Volant was leading, a half-breed driver ran behind the sled. "Cerf Volant, old dog!" I called out. He turned in his harness at the well-known voice, there was a crack of the half-breed's whip like a pistol shot, and the dog, realising that a mighty change had passed over his life and fortunes, bent his head to the collar and trotted on bravely towards the north. The last link of the lone spaces was gone!

II.

A YEAR and a half had passed away.

The reality of the wilderness had become a dream. Idealised by distance and separation—the camp, the lonely meadow, the dim pine woods, the snow-capped mountains, the mighty hush of nature as the great solitude sank at sunset into the sleep of night—all had come back to me in a thousand scenes of memory; and in the midst of the rush and roar of a great city, I had seen, as though in another world, the long vista of unnumbered meadows lying at the gateway of the sunset. I had heard the voice of lonely lakes and pines that whispered into the ear of night the melody of unmade music.

I would go back to it again. Why not? Is there anything on earth better than this wilderness? Is there aught in this short life of ours with less of that pleasure which is sure to turn to pain? with less of those things which are sweet while we toil towards them, and bitter when they lie behind us on the road of life? The gold of this wilderness is nature's own; ring it, change it, spend it, hoard it, there lies not in its millions or in its fractions one atom of alloy.

There is no mountain too lofty to find a frame in the mind's eye of the wanderer; there is no flower too lowly to fill with its fragrance the winter garden of his memory.

I got back to the old scenes again. It was the early autumn; the oak woods along the Red River shores were beginning to yellow under the breath of the north wind; the mosquitoes were all gone; the wild ducks were settling on the prairie pools and the reedy "sloughs" of half-dried water-courses; the grouse were beginning to "pack"; the warm balmy days were followed by fresh cold nights; and the prairies, basking in the mellow sunshine of September, stretched in unbroken line from the oak woods of the river to the distant verge of the western horizon.

About a hundred and fifty miles south of Fort Garry there stood, on the Red River bank, a small Hudson Bay post in the territory of Dakota. The wave of immigration had in my absence flowed fast over this fertile valley of the Red River, and the huts and shanties of settlers were now dotted along the trail that led north towards British territory; the great hungry tide from overcharged Europe was, in fact, eating deeper into the lone land, and month by month the wilderness was losing ground before its sharp and restless surge. But the wilderness had sent its best and truest representative to meet and greet me on the very shore of its lost dominion.

As I drove to the door of the Hudson Bay post, accompanied by a friend who had brought two large

Scotch deer-hounds from England, a huge bushy-tailed dog came charging full tilt upon the new comers. He was followed by three other animals with tails upraised in various forms of fight; the charge was sharp and decisive. The dog of Scotland was ignominiously overthrown, and as he lay extended upon his back I beheld, standing over him with legs firmly planted on all sides of the prostrate foe, and tail shaking unutterable defiance, almost at the back of his own head, the burly form of the unconquered Cerf Volant.

It was a strange coincidence. On the day of my departure I had left him travelling north into distant regions; on the day of my return I found him at the extreme southern limit of Hudson's Bay possession. But changes had come upon the rest of the train. Tigre and Muskeymote had gone to the land where all dogs go. Cariboo yet remained, and two other dogs, Spanker and Pony, had taken their places in the vacant traces of my old train. Nor was Cariboo long to remain; when the time arrived for my departure towards northern regions he too had hauled himself out of life, and Cerf Volant alone remained to link the journey which I was now beginning with the past scenes of former travel.

As I have said, the story of this second journey has, like that of its predecessors, been already told. It will suffice now to broadly enumerate the distances traversed and the work done by this dog ere, passing once again from the wilderness, I introduce my old

friend to the waters of the Pacific, and to the scenes and customs of a new civilisation.

I was now entering the wilderness with no very fixed purpose. Beyond the north and west of my previous wandering there lay a vast region; it was my intention to hold steadily to the north-west, and come out—chance would only determine where. The autumn was yet long enough to carry me across the region of prairie to the southern limit of the sub-arctic forest: within that forest the horse could not penetrate; it is the land of the snow-shoe and dog-sled in winter, of the canoe in summer. I reckoned upon the winter snow to carry me nearly to the Pacific; if not, the canoe against the current must do the rest.

Perhaps as to this plan the reader may ask two questions—Why, in going towards the Pacific Ocean, should the current be against you? And why did you select the rigorous winter season for crossing these northern latitudes?

To answer one question is partly to answer both. The great river systems of the north have their sources at the Pacific side of the Rocky Mountains, not in that range, but in the Coast or Cascade range, which follows the general line of the Pacific shore. Their various tributary streams unite their waters into two main channels, which pierce the Rocky Mountains in two great passes, and flow out into the Silurian plain lying east of the range, to finally join the Mackenzie River, flowing into the Arctic Ocean.

In winter these rivers form vast frozen highways,

along which dogs and men can travel with rapidity ; and in summer, the rushing currents, swollen by the melting snows of three mountain ranges, limit the canoe rate of travel to slow and tedious toil. But in addition to this there is another reason why winter affords, so far as rapid travel is concerned, the easiest time for piercing these northern solitudes. In summer it is not possible to travel through the forest ; innumerable swamps, unbridged rivers, quantities of fallen timber, lakes without number, are everywhere to be found, and the longest detour by water is generally more expeditious than the shortest line by land ; but in the winter the snow has covered the tangled wreck of *brûlé* and fallen forest, the frost has bound fast as iron the widest swamp or muskeg, and river, lake, and rapid lie hushed under many feet of solid ice. True, the cold is then intense, but cold had been tried before, dog travel was a certainty, and to cross in winter the vast region of this northern forest had in it the charm that ever attends the attainment of perfect freedom to wander where you will.

And now for the means of crossing it—the Husky dog, *Cerf Volant*, who all this time has been menacing the prostrate form of his Scotch antagonist with an animosity worthy of several condensed generations of Lords Warden of the English marches. The removal of this bushy-tailed Hotspur from the fallen Douglas was accomplished, however, without difficulty, and it is pleasing to record that, so far as welcome by tail, salutation by bark, and general recognition by ear,

eye, and paw were concerned, his demeanour towards me left nothing to be desired. As eighteen months earlier I had left Cumberland on the Saskatchewan with this dog and his followers, so now again I quitted the post of Frog Point, on the Red River, once more his owner. Two other dogs also accompanied me; Pony, a dog much given to dodges and perverseness, and Spanker, a Husky of hauling powers but peevish proclivities, the memory of whose tail, removed in early youth, seemed still to rankle in the recesses of his mind.

It is needless now to dwell on the time that followed. How, for six hundred miles, the dogs ran light across the prairies to my hut at the Forks of the Saskatchewan; how, when the winter deepened, the time for their toil came, and the daily work of preparation for piercing the northern forest went on; then the long journey began. For sixty-four days, through wood and waste, along endless stretches of frozen river, over the ice of unknown lakes, the untiring dog held his way. The deep Green Lake, the icy Lac Isle à la Crosse, the long ridge of Methy, the valley of the Clearwater, the great Lake Athabasca, the steep shores that overlook the winding channels of the Peace River, saw, one by one, the bushy tail and downbent head of the dauntless hauler; and, night after night, the camp fires along this stretch of fifteen hundred miles shed their light upon the Untiring, and beheld him as faithful and as jolly as when we had quitted my log-hut at the Forks of the Saskatchewan.

So long continued had been his toil, and so bravely had he borne his part by frozen flood and over icy field, that I had long since conferred upon him the sobriquet of "the Untiring." I had also cut his original name into the shorter one of Cerf Vola—a change which, whatever may have been its origin, seemed mightily to please the principal party concerned in it, and to afford him so much satisfaction that its reiteration in camp or during off-work moments generally caused him to indulge in a series of jocular howls, accompanied by boisterous flounderings in the snow, most comical to look at. I have reason to believe that the jocularity of this noise arose from a method which I had adopted of impressing the new name more vividly upon his memory by presenting him, at the moment of its utterance, with a portion of white fish or of pemmican. The intimate connection existing between the stomach and the brain is a well-known physical fact; but the advantages arising from utilising that connection as a means of imparting instruction to the youthful mind has not, so far as I am aware, been yet adopted in the educational system of the country. But to proceed.

This laughing howl, if I might so call it, had about it an expression of face irresistibly ridiculous. When a dog cries with pain, he does so with both sides of his mouth; but when he laughs it is only one side that he calls into play. This peculiar expression of one-sided mirth was indulged in by Cerf Vola on all occasions when he considered that he had claims

upon society, which society, in the shape of my little party, was slow to recognise. When the day's march was at an end, should any delay occur in removing him from harness, his laugh was instantly heard from the traces of his train, and if his white fish had been smaller than usual, or there existed an acute craving for a moose bone or stray scrap of pemmican, or any of those unused odds and ends which the great dog world instinctively recognises as its perquisite, then the Untiring was wont to curl his upper lip into a smile, and to pour forth a whimper of universal satisfaction with everybody in general.

Sixty-three days passed away. I stood some fifteen hundred miles from the starting point at the Forks of the Saskatchewan; prairie, forest, lake, muskeg, and river reach had drifted away into the sleep of the wilderness. It was midnight over the deep-sunk channel of the Upper Peace River; there was no need of moon or star to show the river track, for its white frozen channel lay broadly marked between the dark overhanging banks, now nearly clear of snow. I was alone with one Indian. During the last ten days we had travelled only at night, the surface of the ice was then only firm enough to bear the weight of dogs and men. But the snow surface, although hard at night, was frozen, by the action of the cold upon the thaw of the previous day, into honeycombed projections which hurt the feet of the dogs and of their drivers as they toiled along over it. We had stopped our march for the midnight halt and cup of tea; the dogs lay

crouched within their traces, in that happy power of forgetfulness which, whatever may be their trouble, enables them to sink at any moment into the oblivion of sleep and rest.

“How far now, Kalder?” I asked.

“Not far. Five hours more.”

Fifteen miles out of fifteen hundred should seem a short distance, and yet it did not to me that night. I was tired, heart and soul, of snow-shoe.

“Let us go on, it will be the sooner over.”

Rousing up the sleeping dogs, we went on for the last time. They were loth to quit their snow beds. What knew they that the end of the long journey was so nigh? In that at least we had the advantage. The Untiring, still leading, ran very lame. He was booted on both fore feet; but even boots could not save him from the sharp glass-like ice.

A misty dawn broke over the scene. Great ridges bare of snow loomed up around us; the rushing of many rills from the shores, and the noise of the river beneath could be heard at intervals; the surface snow and ice grew soft and slushy, and at every step we sank through the yielding footing.

Poor old dog! thin, worn, and lame; his woolly hair no longer able to hide the sharp angles of shoulder and hip bones; with neck frayed by constant friction of collar and moose-skin traces; with tail no longer curled over back, but hanging in a kind of sad slant behind him; nevertheless, gamely tugging at trace and collar—thus he drew nigh his last halt.

It was the 8th of April. Behind us lay that great plain of northern North America, which stretches from the Bay of Hudson to the Rocky Mountains; in front rose a range of snow-clad hills. We had reached the western bounds of the great plain, and at the little fort of St. John's dogs and men might lie down to rest.

We did lie down to rest for some days, but Cerf Vola got up much sooner than his master; in fact, when three days had passed, he was so fit for further exploration that he insisted upon setting out, on his own account, for an additional fifty miles on the river during the middle of the fourth night after our arrival. Of this, however, more anon.

It must suffice now to know that for ten or twelve days I lived the life of the northern fur fort. I wrote notes of travel, read a stray Californian paper (it was eight months old), watched the dogs, looked at the river, noted the daily advance of spring on willow thicket and birchen copse, and at night heard the fireside story of chase, love, war, or adventure in the great northern land.

What if here I tell a story of these northern wilds, one told to me on a dark night of drift and storm at the pine fire of a Hudson's Bay log-house?

THE DOG-DRIVER'S STORY.

A region of intense desolation is the northern coast of North America. The night of the Arctic winter lies heavily upon it, crushing out all sense or sound of life for long months together.

Berg, floe, and pack upon the sea join frozen hands with a dreary waste of drifted snow upon the land, and low-lying cape and ice-piled shore lie in a chaos of desolation, where nought marks the hidden line between earth and water, save when some ice-crusted rock or tempest-beat boulder lifts its head above the lonely waste.

Summer comes to this dreary region, but only as a fleeting visitor. By midsummer the snow has vanished from the shore; the ice has loosened in the rivers, long channels of blue open sea lie between the vast fields and floes of ice. On the undulating surface of the ground mosses and short grass appear; but the iron grasp of winter is never wholly loosed from the land, and even in the long day of July, which knows no sunset, scarcely a foot beneath the surface the earth remains bound in an eternity of frost. Yet this short fleeting summer brings to this northern land a host of strange visitors. From the far distant pine forests of the Great Slave Lake, from the nearer, but still remote woods of dwarf firs and spectral junipers which fringe the shores of the Great Bear Lake, and from the yet farther off region where the crystal Athabasca lies amid its Laurentian wilds, there come great herds of reindeer trooping thither on their summer quest. Here along the northern sea, in this short summer which is one long day, the great herds bring forth their young. Here, too, birds in endless numbers come to nest and to increase; the wild swan, the wavy, the goose, the great crane, meet in a com-

mon feeling of peace and security, and, safe at last from the universal enemy, man, make their nests along the margins of low-set pools and peaty swamps, filling the long silent air with voice and life and motion.

But this season is a fleeting one. Ere September has reached its close wild storms of snow and sleet sweep the Arctic twilight; the waves freeze as they lave the wintry shore, the grass rustles dry and dead, the reindeer vanish from the scene, and in many a long waving V-shaped line the wild birds sail southward from a silent shore.

The only portion of this immense shore line which can be known to man is that which lies near the mouth of the River Mackenzie. To the east and to the west of this river there stretches away a line of coast which has once or twice been looked upon by human eyes only to relapse again into endless loneliness. Franklin, Back, Richardson, Simpson, and Rae have seen those endless capes and low-sunk rocks flit by them as the little boats which carried their fortunes glided, for the first and last time, along these lonely shores. These men, it is true, one by one at different times linked together the separate pieces of coast until at length from east to west, from Baffin's Bay to Behring's Strait, a single shore line was given to North America; but with that knowledge the work ended. The explorers went and came, all save one hapless lot, and the curtain which their courage and labour had for a moment raised sank again for ever over the north coast line of North America.

There is but one highway, if it may be so called, by which this remote and most desolate region can be reached from the outside world. That highway is the Mackenzie River, the largest save one, the vastest in volume save none, in the continent of North America.

But that highway to the north coast is itself remote and distant; its farthest feeders, though they lie fully two thousand five hundred miles far in the interior continent, are difficult of access. To reach them requires long and arduous labour; and even at their sources the traveller stands in a wilderness so remote that a thousand miles of savagery lie between him and the first echo of civilisation.

Down the great stream of the Mackenzie the desolation deepens on the land. The shores become more destitute of human and animal life; the scenery expands into a vaster and a loftier loneliness; between huge silent shores a majestic volume of water rolls steadily into the north, no boat upon its bosom, no stir of life upon its banks, save when, at long, long intervals, the birch canoe of some wandering Indian glides under the shadow of the forest shores, or the solitary boat bound for the fur fort on the lake breasts up the lonely stream. And this is only in summer. In winter, deep beneath high-piled ice and crusted snow lies the mighty river, its shores wrapped in drift, its leagues of forest standing dim and motionless, their tapering tops cutting jagged cones against the early twilight; no sound across its broad bosom save the owl-hoot, or the crack and rent of ice; no

vestige of man upon the snow ; no shadow of bird in the low-set sunshine of the mid-winter mid-day.

Yet the great river is not altogether devoid of human existence. Man has sought even this friendless region in pursuit of trade ; behind these river shores stretch hundreds of leagues of muskeg, forest, waste, lake, and wilderness, where the sable, the otter, and the fox roam through the long winter. Here and there, at scarce intervals, by shore of lake or bank of river, stand grouped together a few wigwams of Indian hunters, and, far down the great river, in the last thousand miles of its course, two solitary groups of wooden houses, the forts of the Fur Company, give shelter to some half a dozen men, the sole white denizens of this mighty waste.

Twenty years from this present time, in the most remote post of this northern land, an old man lay sick unto death. He was the *bourgeois*, or master of the place, a Scotchman from the Isles. He had lived his life in the north, and had played his part in the toil and travel of the wilderness, and had faced the drift of Arctic storm, and the gloom of the northern winter for full thirty years. Death's stoutest captains, Cold and Hunger, had often waged war against him, and put him to sore strait in far-away scenes of winter forest and ice-piled lake and pathless solitude ; but now Death himself had come and laid his iron grasp upon him, even in his own comfortable log-fort, against the fireside of which cold was powerless, and into whose provision-store hunger could not enter.

The time was the long winter. The birds had sailed south from the Arctic shore; the ice had bridged further across the wide river; the earth had wrapped itself in a deeper cloak of snow; the drift of storm blew daily fiercer across the long reach of pine-bordered stream; the wail of swaying pines smote the ear in more monotonous cadence; darkness was on the outside world of wilderness—Death stood in the inner circle of the fur fort.

It was a night of wild drift and storm. The wind seemed to knock loudly for admission at every doorway and window frame of the log-huts, and the wide hearths, blazing with pine-logs, sent back a defiant roar at the storm without, and burned fiercer as each gust shook the framework houses and died away in the moaning depths of the vast outside forest. Seated around these blazing fires, the little garrison of the fort spent that November night in long discussion; for Ba'tiste, the French half-breed, and Paradis, the old Canadian postmaster, and Samuel Henderson, the Swampy Indian of questionable civilisation, had many things to say and much platitude to utter ere, in the language of the law courts, Death had passed his final sentence on their old master.

Paradis in particular seemed imbued with the necessities of the occasion. He talked and smoked incessantly; he gave utterance to many profound sentiments, all more or less tending to prove that death was an event which must come sooner or later in the life of every man, whether he was engaged in

the fur trade or in other pursuits; but at the same time it was to be gathered, from the general drift of the old postmaster's harangue, that he considered Death had, with a wise discrimination, selected the circle of his friends for earlier visitation, and had left him, Paradis, for a remote and by no means certain future. Ba'tiste sat a ready listener to his superior's logic, and the Swampy smoked with such placid persistency that it was evident he regarded the occasion as one not to be lost sight of for the display of his ruling passion, tobacco, in the supreme moment of his master's life.

While thus these three men passed the long night in platitudes and pipe-filling, the scene in the sick man's room had developed into its final phase. As the night wore towards the dawn he had called to his bedside his clerk, a young Scotchman from the Lewis, a distant kinsman of his own, and had put this question to him: "Do you know the graveyard on the island at Fort Simpson?"

"Yes; I know it well," answered the clerk.

"Give me your word," went on the sick man, "that you'll take my body to that graveyard, and lay it by the side of the boy I buried there twenty years ago."

"It's many a long day's journey from here," answered the clerk, "and the track is a rough one over the ice in the early winter."

"Yes, it is," replied the old fur-hunter; "but you are my own kith and kin, boy, and you'll do it for a

dying man? Promise me you'll do it, and I'll die happy." The clerk gave the promise asked for, and the sick man's fingers closed on his hands as he did so. It was nearing the daylight hour; the storm had sunk into the strange hush of dawn; over the tree-tops to the east the blue cold light of winter was faintly spreading into a broader band of light. The old hunter's eyes had been closed for some minutes; suddenly he opened them widely; the glimmer of the daylight through the small window-panes struck upon his fading sight. "Daylight!" he said, in a kind of hoarse whisper, "daylight already! Get the snow-shoes ready, boy."

"Ready for what?" asked the clerk, stooping down to catch the dying words.

"Ready for the road—for me. See, it's daylight, boy, and the road is long; it's time to start." He said no more, and ere the sun had touched the pine-tops to the east, the old fur-hunter had put out upon that dim sea whose waves for ever sob against the shores of the Unknown Land.

The promise was to be kept. Ere mid-day had come the little fort was busy making preparations for the long funeral of its dead master. Dogs, harness, and snow-shoes were looked to and got ready; the dead body, wrapped in canvas, was placed upon a narrow sled, another sled was filled with blankets, provisions, and other requisites for a three weeks' journey. Eight dogs were selected for the work, and by evening all was ready for the long lonely tramp.

And in truth it would be difficult to imagine a more desolate undertaking than the one which now lay before the young Scotch clerk and his French-Canadian companion. For six hundred miles there lay this lonely, silent, frozen river; along reach after reach the solemn-standing pines bordered the high o'erhanging banks; so stark and stiff and devoid of life was the great solitude around that it might well have seemed to these two *voyageurs* as though they were to be travellers through a world as dead as the lifeless clay they carried with them.

It is needless now to dwell upon the days and nights that followed their departure from the fort. At times there came wild storms, before whose breath the dry snow flew in blinding tempests; at times the sun shone brightly upon the dazzling surface of river, and shore, and snow-laden pine-tree, and at night there came the weird lights of the north to spread the vast vault above with myriad shafts of many-coloured light, and to fill the silent waste of earth and heaven with the mute music of these wondrous streamers.

Wonderful are these winter nights in the north, when the glory of the aurora is abroad in the heavens, filling from horizon to zenith the dark dome of night; for it seems then as though stars and sky sent down a dew of rainbow radiance to touch the lofty shores and solemn standing pines, and to cast upon the silent reaches of frozen river and the dim waste of ice-piled lake that weird light whose essence still lies hid from science in the unreached caverns of the north.

It was the seventh evening of the journey. The lonely funeral had completed at sunset about a third of its long distance. The camping hour found it, as usual, near the base of the high overhanging shore of the Mackenzie River. By means of landslips or summer water channels seeking the main river this high bank was generally easy of ascent when the camping hour came; and as dogs going to camp will haul with ease over hills and through thickets which would appear utterly impracticable to them at other moments, there had been no great difficulty on the previous nights in reaching this upper level for purposes of shelter, fuel, and camp-making.

On the evening we speak of, however, the bank hung steeply over the river, and when the moment came for giving the dogs the well-known word for camping, all their most frantic efforts were useless to drag to the summit the heavy sled which carried the dead body of the fur-hunter. The Frenchman's sled bearing provisions, now lightened in weight by the consumption of eight dogs and two men for so many days, ran without any difficulty to the top of the steep ascent; but voice, and whip, and push of pole from behind, and freely lavished imprecation upon, or adjuration to, each particular dog, failed altogether to carry the other sled even half-way to the summit.

Meanwhile precious moments of daylight were ebbing fast; camp-making in the dark on such a night as this would be a long and difficult toil. What was to be done? Better take the dogs from

their traces, and leave the sled upon the ice of the river until the daylight would again cause the march to be resumed. This course was resolved upon. What evil could befall the dead? In the vast solitude that lay around, in the merciless rigour of the cold towards living man, lay the safety of the dead one; so the dogs were unloosed from their burden, and leaving the sled and its load upon the river, the men and dogs climbed the steep bank and disappeared into the forest.

It was a night of extreme cold, and the shelter of the snow-laden pines was grateful, for other shelter there was none. The winter camps in the north know neither hut nor tent. The fire in the open forest, the blanket laid upon the chopped pine-brush bed, are all the *voyageur* requires for his nightly camp. The snow may fall, the tempest shake the lofty pines, or from a still grey sky the cold may come with its intensest rigour, until the trees snap like pistol-shots, and the smoke clings to the ground, unable to ascend into a colder atmosphere; but all the same the ground gives a bed, the sky a roof, to the traveller in the north.

The upper bank of the river was level, but the rage of many a tempest had laid low the outer trees, and the men had to penetrate some distance before the forest became open enough to allow of a good camp being made. Then the old routine went on; the snow was cleared from the ground with the snowshoes, used like shovels; dry trees were felled for

fuel, a fire lighted, shavings were cut from a dry branch to quicker kindle the larger wood; the provision sled was emptied of its load of blankets, kettles, and food, and the harness arranged for use in the dim light of the morning.

All these preparations for the camp took some time to complete, and darkness had fallen on the forest ere the work of tree-cutting had been finished.

The Canadian's strong strokes were still sounding through the silent waste. The Scotch clerk had filled the copper kettle with snow, and was in the act of placing it upon the rising fire. All at once he stopped, laid his kettle upon the ground, and rose to his feet in the attitude of a man who hears some unexpected voice suddenly call to him.

"Gaudet," he said to his companion, "did you speak?"

The Canadian was only a few paces distant. "I said nothing," he answered. "What did you hear?"

But ere the other could reply, there passed through the forest, as distinctly as human voice could utter the sound, the single word *Marche!*—a word often used in the daily toil of dog-driving, but uttered now in a tone of deep suppressed suffering, filled with a kind of helpless agony, and yet terribly familiar in accent and in meaning, though altogether inconsistent with the time, the place, and the solitude.

"There are Indians on the river," said the Canadian, hastily; "they are forcing their dogs up the bank to our camp."

The other man did not answer, for a thought had possession of his brain that paralysed the power of speech, and froze back into his heart the very current of his life. The voice that uttered the well-known word was no strange one to him; it was the voice of his old master, of the man whose dead body he was bearing to the grave.

Ere the Canadian could again speak there came, a third time repeated, the slowly uttered word; and again it seemed like the wail of some lost creature sinking 'neath a nocturnal sea, and vainly struggling to free itself from some overpowering fate. The Canadian moved quickly towards his companion, the fire, as he entered the circle of light, showing the terror that had suddenly come to him. He, too, had caught the accent, and recognised in the sound the voice of the dead fur-hunter. Nor were the men the only evidences of the reality of this spoken sound; the dogs had half risen from their lairs in the snow, and with ears erect, and heads pointed to the river, they seemed to look for the approach of some one from the outside solitude.

Thus, in the full light of the fire, now rapidly illumining the dusky twilight of the snow and of the forest, the two travellers stood in the attitude of men who, face to face with the evidence of their senses, feel the creepings of that indefinable fear which lies in the faintest breathing of that vast shadowy world beyond the narrow circle of our little lives.

But whatever be the enemy, or whatever be the fear

that oppresses the mind of man, it is easier to go and meet it than to stand still. Instinctively the two men moved towards the river, through the tangled wreck of fallen forest, passing the bordering outwork of overthrown pines. They gained the edge of the high bank, and looked out over the great river. Vague and vast it lay beneath them. The shades of night had closed over it, but the white light of the snow still showed the broad expanse, and revealed in dim outline the hummocks and ice-hills of the central channel. But the men had little thought of ice or snow or river channel; with anxious eyes they peered into the dusky light, and tried to scan the sled that held the dead.

Below, on the ice, just as it had been left, it lay dark against the white ground of the snow, and close beside it crouched a black form that seemed to move at times along it. In the intense silence of the solitude a low noise could be distinctly heard. It was the noise of the gnawing of teeth, a crunching sound.

The two men on the upper bank were no novices in the sights or sounds of the wilderness. Indistinct as was the light, faint as was the sound, they recognised at once the presence of a large wolverine, whose saw-like teeth were busily engaged in cutting the lines that bound to its narrow bier the dead body of their old master.

Startled by the voices on the shore, the wolverine vanished in a long slouching gallop into the ice of the central river. So far the page was easy to read; but

the weird word that had called them to the bank in time to save from the ravages of this wild animal the dead body which the dying fur-hunter had so earnestly prayed might rest beside his son,—there was no sound in the life of the wilderness, no sight in all the wide range of forest, lake, or river, to cast light or clue upon its strange significance.

With the eight dogs formed into one team, and by dint of sheer strength of men and dogs working together, the dead body was brought up the steep bank from the river, and placed in its old position in the camp. There was no trace of fear in the hearts and minds of the travellers now. If the lonely word had been a voice from the shadowy world of death, it had spoken with a purport easily to be read by the living human sense.

The journey was resumed on the morrow. On the twelfth day the half-way post of Fort Norman was reached. At this station the travellers expected to find fresh dogs and supplies to carry them to their destination; but the dogs belonging to the fort were absent on a long trading expedition, and supplies in the store were so scarce that little more than half rations could be spared for the long journey still before the party. On again along the endless track; still the same silent, frozen wilderness; the shore lined by the rigid standing pines; the long river reaches swept by bitter storm, or lying prone under the quiet cold of a starlight morning. Now and again a wolf or a wolverine crossed the track in front, or

dogged the footsteps of the funeral party from a long distance behind.

As the miles went on the dogs became daily more reduced. Starvation never works with man or beast so fiercely as when it has cold and toil to help it at the task; and now, as the stock of white fish grew smaller day by day, and the evening dog-ration was reduced from a single fish to half a fish, and then to less, the gaunt sides of the dogs sank deeper in, the sharp bones rose higher out through the long coats of hair that could not hide the skeletons beneath. Still the teams toiled on.

No other animal loves more dearly than the dog his daily food, and goes to greater lengths and resorts to such strange devices to procure it; but no other animal can starve so well either, can go on, day after day, without letting the hunger in his stomach eat into his heart and brain, and paralyse the power of work. In the great northern waste it has occasionally fallen out that dogs have gone seven days and nights without food, and drawn a sled in some shape or other all that weary time.

Now, as the days went by and the ration grew less and less, the teams began to show that first prompting of starvation-fierceness—they quarrelled with each other at all times when it was possible to do so, and at night, when the hour of their scanty meal came, they fought savagely for the pittance of fish, and their sharp teeth snapped, as with the spring of steel the jaws struck together in their wolf-like bitings.

At last the journey drew near a close. The twentieth night, the last but one, found them camped some twenty miles short of Fort Simpson. By the morrow's sunset the funeral would be over, the dead man would have reached his resting-place. The camp was made as usual in the wooded shore; in view of an early start long before daybreak, the men soon lay down to sleep. The last morsel of food had been flung to the starving dogs; it had not been a drop in the desert of their hunger; they roamed through the snow in restless pain; at last, all was quiet.

It was about the middle of the night when there seemed suddenly to echo through the forest a sharp cry. Both the travellers sprang hastily from their deer-skin coverings; the fire had burned out, but the moonlight on the snow made surrounding objects plainly visible. They were alone in the camp, the dogs were not in their places, the dead body had also disappeared. "It was the same voice again," said the Scotchman. "I heard it in my sleep. The dogs have carried away the body into the forest." As the men listened, half uprisen from their robes, the sound of snarling and snapping of teeth came from the depths of the wood beyond where they lay. To plunge into the snow, and follow the trail took them but a short time, and soon a spot was reached where in fancied safety the hungry pack were busily engaged in rending to pieces the covering of the dead body; they had already torn it from the sled, and nothing

but the marble substance of the frozen flesh had saved it from destruction.

Driving away the maddened beasts with difficulty, the two men brought back the body to the camp. The night yet wanted many hours of daylight, but the men were in no mood for sleep. Putting together their few remaining things, they harnessed up the lean and starving dogs, and set out on their last stage. It was a long hard march, and many a time the whips fell heavily upon the wretched teams; but at length the snow-roofed houses of the fort arose in the great waste of solitude, and safe at last from ravage of wild beast or starving dog lay the body of the old hunter.

And now, what say we of this strange word, thus spoken twice in the silence of the night? Nothing. The light that human reason would cast upon such things is after all but a rushlight set in a vaster wilderness than even this immeasurable waste of the north. Told to me by the chief actor in that long funeral tramp, I am content to leave the explanation of the story to other hands.

The world is made up of men who are ready to believe anything, and men who are ready to deny everything. Alas! how little the breezes of denial or of asseveration can ruffle the great ocean of death! In the vast sea that lies outside this life, the echoes of disbelief or of credence are lost ere they quit our shores. Yet from that dim ocean stray sounds are sometimes borne inland, and from the endless

surges of Eternity, waifs, such as this warning word, are cast ever and anon upon the sands of time.

But let no one doubt the faith of the man whose word has been my evidence. For many a wintry mile of travel he had been my sole companion. If man has a right to place trust in the spoken word of another man, I have a right to put faith and trust in the story of this lonely dog-drive, as it was told to me one night on Lac Vers, by the Scotch clerk of bygone days, now himself a veteran fur-hunter of the north.

We must go back to Cerf Vola.

We left him pursuing an independent course, of his own free-will and pleasure, westward towards the Rocky Mountains from the fort called St. John's. This strange proceeding on his part occurred in this wise.

About the fourth day of my sojourn at St. John's it was decided to send forward to the mountain portage, which lay fifty or sixty miles further west, some bags of moose pemmican, destined for my use in the canoe journey which it was my intention to pursue after crossing the eastern or outer range of the Rocky Mountains. From St. John's to this outer range I was to use horses for transport. Being heartily tired of the heavy labour of the snow-shoes, I was glad to have again a prospect of saddle work; and although the country was not yet quite free of snow, and the brooks and streams were filled to overflowing by the rapid thaw, still I felt that any difficulty was to be

preferred to that toil over the frozen river, alternately sinking in the slush of wet snow, or cutting one's feet over the knife-like edges of the midnight ice. It became necessary, therefore, to send forward, while the river was yet frozen, the heavy portion of the supplies for the trans-mountain portion of my onward journey. An Iroquois Indian, well-known for his great power of snow-shoe travel, was sent in charge of these things; for the ice had now become broken and unsound in many places, and none but experienced feet could venture safely upon it.

It was midnight when the Indian started from St. John's with a single sled and four dogs; when morning came, Cerf Vola was not to be found, Spanker had also vanished. Either from a mistaken idea that the Rocky Mountains were places sacred to an indiscriminate distribution among dogs generally of pemmican and other condiments, or from some ever-to-be-unknown reason, set deep in the recesses of their own minds, these two dogs had set out as amateur travellers as wildly intent upon getting at once into the snowy hills as though they had just been elected members of an Alpine Club.

As the day that followed their departure wore on, their absence began to assume a new and more painful phase. The clerk in charge of the fort came to me with forebodings of evil.

"There had been poison spread along the trail for wolves near Hudson's Hope by Charette, the master of that place," he said. "Two of his dogs, following

loose as those of mine had done, had fallen victims to it only a couple of months earlier." Here was news! For Spanker, I frankly admit, I did not care one pin. It had been always impossible to open friendly relations with that suspicious hauler. It is true that even had he been so minded, he could not have wagged his tail to his best friend, for the simple reason, as I have before stated, that he had no tail to wag; but, nevertheless, even had that appendage been left intact by the guardian of his youth, his disposition was of such a nature as to have precluded the possibility of his ever holding out the tail of friendship to any man. So much for Spanker the Suspicious.

But it would not be easy to estimate in the coinage of words the value I placed upon *Cerf Vola*; enough to say, that not for all the costly furs ever gathered into the forts of the Peace River would I have heard the news that my old and faithful hauler had fallen a victim to *Charette's* poison.

It was useless to indulge in any anticipatory threats of vengeance against *Charette*; useless, too, to devise schemes of safety. If the harm was to be, nothing could now help it. The inevitable has at least the single charm about it of not asking our interference one way or another.

So the days passed by, and at last a fair soft morning came to breathe upon the great steep hills that rose around *St. John's*, and to call forth from their bare bosoms the long-pent sweetness of the spring. Still sullen in his bed lay the great river,