

**SNOW-SHOES
AND SLEDGES**

**KIRK
MUNROE**





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FOR A MOMENT THE SENSATION WAS SICKENING

SNOW-SHOES AND SLEDGES

A SEQUEL TO
"THE FUR-SEAL'S TOOTH"

BY

KIRK MUNROE

AUTHOR OF THE "MATES" SERIES "DERRICK STERLING"
"THE FLAMINGO FEATHER" "WAKULLA" ETC.

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ARCTIC ALASKA

*Rivers of ice and a sea of snow,
A wilderness frigid and white ;
Mystical skies with a tremulous glow,
And days that are turned into night.*



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SNOW-SHOES AND SLEDGES

CHAPTER I

ALLOWED TO SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

OF course, if every reader of this story had also read its forerunner there would be no need of introducing its characters, for they would already be old friends. We would merely meet them at the place where they have been patiently awaiting us all this time, give them an encouraging nod of recognition, and tell them to go ahead with their adventures as fast as they pleased. That would be well enough for us who are acquainted with them; but to those who may chance to read this sequel without having first read the story that gives it a reason for being, the references to people, things, and incidents of the past that must necessarily be made from time to time would be confusing. Therefore it seems fitting that those characters of the previous story who are to figure with any prominence in this one should be properly introduced; and in order to avoid the discriminating partiality of the author, who would be apt to say too much concerning those whom he fancied, or too little about those whom he disliked, each one shall be given the privilege of introducing himself. To begin with, here is our old friend Phil Ryder.

“Yes, that is my name right enough, and I want to

say first thing that I think it is high time some notice were taken of us, after the unsatisfactory conclusion of that other book, and the wretched state of uncertainty in which we were all left. It seemed to me the very worst ending to a story that I ever heard of."

"But, Phil, it wasn't the end. There was to be a sequel."

"Well, you didn't say so, and nobody knew, and I for one have been greatly mortified ever since, without a chance to say a word on the subject either. Now, as to myself, if any one cares to know who I am, and where I am, and how I got here, I am the son of Mr. John Ryder, of New London, Connecticut. He is a mining expert, and is at present engaged to investigate some properties near Sitka, Alaska, where I was to have joined him last May. It is now September, and I haven't got there yet, though I have been travelling steadily ever since April, and trying my very best to reach Sitka. I'm sure it isn't my fault that things have happened to take me most everywhere else, and finally to drop me away up here in northern Alaska, two thousand miles or so beyond Sitka. I'm on the right track now, though, for I am on a steamboat belonging to Mr. Hamer, bound up the Yukon River. It will take me to the head of navigation. Then all I shall have to do will be to cross the Divide to Chilkat, and take another steamer for Sitka, which place I expect to reach before the winter is over. Then my father's anxiety will be relieved, for I suppose he is anxious, though I can't see why he should be. He must know that I am perfectly well able to take care of myself, and will turn up all right some time. Both he and Aunt Ruth seem to think that I am careless and liable to get into scrapes, while really I never do anything important without the most careful consideration—that is, whenever there is time for considering.

“For instance, I didn’t decide that to go up the Yukon was the very best and shortest way to reach Sitka until I had talked it all over with Serge. I’m awfully glad it is the best thing to do, though, for it is so much more interesting to travel over a new route than back by the one you have just come. That’s one reason I wouldn’t pay any attention to that schooner we passed soon after leaving St. Michaels, though she did seem to be trying to signal us. I was afraid she might be bound south to Oonalaska, or even to Sitka itself, in which case our plans would have been all upset again. I should have hated that, for if there is any one thing I believe in it is sticking to a plan and carrying it out after it is once decided upon. So does Serge, who is one of the very best fellows that ever lived, even if he is a little slow. I am mighty glad to have him for a travelling companion, for he is true as steel and awfully level-headed. I only wish old Jalap were with us, for he is about the best fun of any one I know. I don’t suppose we shall ever see him again, though; and, now that I come to think of it, it does seem as if we ought to have made a search for him on Oonimak before leaving in such a hurry. But as we were prisoners of war on board the cutter, I don’t exactly see how we could have done anything but what we did. Here comes Serge now, and you really ought to know him; so allow me to—”

“Hold on, Phil; we are to introduce ourselves, you know, and I don’t want to be handicapped by all the nice things you would be certain to say about me. Yes, I am Serge—Serge Belcofsky, born in Sitka long after Alaska became part of the United States. I went to school there, of course, but after graduating I still longed for a better education than Sitka afforded, so I shipped aboard a homeward-bound whaler for New London, Connecticut, where I went to school for a

year. There I met Phil Ryder, who was not only the most popular fellow and the best athlete in the whole school, but who became the best friend I ever had. If he wasn't, I should never have given him the fur-seal's tooth which a Chilkat chief gave to my father. On his death my mother gave it to me, and soon after it passed into Phil's hands he lost it. Since then it has turned up so many times, in such mysterious ways, and has had so much to do with shaping our fortunes, that I can't help believing at least part of the old tales concerning it. Anyhow, the way it has managed to follow us right up to date is certainly wonderful. It isn't likely that we shall see it again, though, now that the old Eskimo has got hold of it, for he evidently realizes its value.

"Where am I now? On a river steamer bound for Sitka by way of the Yukon, of course. You see, I left New London almost a year ago and started for Sitka on the schooner *Seamew*. At Victoria, British Columbia, who should I meet but Phil Ryder, who also shipped on the *Seamew*. She got to Sitka, but we didn't, and though we seem to be headed that way now, while Phil is confident that we are going straight there, no one knows what may happen. I hope my dear mother isn't worrying about me. If I was only sure of that, and that I should land Phil in Sitka some time, I know I should enjoy this trip immensely. But, as Mr. Coombs says—"

"Hold hard there, hearty! You may allow that I'm a thousand miles away; but I'm not. And when it comes to taking words out of my very mouth, you'll find that I'm right alongside. As my friend old Kite Roberson uster say, 'A man what can't speak up for hisself hadn't orter be allowed to vote.' My name is Jalap Coombs, half Yankee and half British subject, late mate of the *Seamew*, now acting cap'n of the

schooner *Philomeel*, in which me and Mr. Ryder is sarching for the slippery young chaps what has jest now interdooced theirselves. A while ago we thought we had 'em, but things happened, and now we're all at sea again without an idee of how the wind 'll blow next. But as old Kite uster offen say, 'When you don't know what *to* do, the best thing is to do nothing.' That is what we are liable to do for some time, seeing as the *Philomeel* are hard and fast aground on a mud bank, with a nor' wind blowing all the water outer Norton Sound."

"And to think that I, John Ryder, after spending the whole summer in searching for my son Phil, should at length have actually got within sight of him away up here almost to the North Pole, only to have the young scamp sail away and disappear again, as oblivious of my presence as though I had never existed! And now this miserable accident, that puts an end to my following him any farther! Oh, it is too bad! too bad! I did think that all this miscarriage of plans and getting lost and being whisked off to all sorts of out-of-the-way places was purely accidental, or only owing to the extraordinary carelessness for which Phil has always been noted. Now, however, I must confess that it really does look as though he were ready and willing to go in any direction save towards Sitka. I can't conceive what inducements that trader-fellow of whom Nikrik told us can have offered to entice my son up the Yukon at this time of the year. From all accounts the trader must be a pretty bad lot, and I tremble to think of what may happen to my Phil under his influence. What did Nikrik say his name was?"

"Gerald Hamer is my name, and though I have never had the pleasure of meeting Mr. John Ryder, from what I have seen of his son I should judge him

to be a man well worth meeting. Phil is certainly a fine fellow, as well as the best rifle shot I ever ran across, and I am more than glad to have him join my expedition. That boy Serge, too, is a trump, and together they make a strong team, for while the first is impulsive, careless, and inclined to carry things with a dash, the other is cool, steady as a rock, and slow to act, but certain to get there in the end. As for myself, I am leading an expedition up the Yukon with the intention of establishing a trading-post at Forty Mile, a mining camp some two thousand miles up the river. I hope to reach there in this steamer, the *Chimo*, before navigation closes. Then I expect to go out over the Chilkoot Pass by snow-shoes and sledges, and so finally reach San Francisco in time to bring up a new stock of goods for next summer. It is now so late, though, that I begin to have my doubts as to whether this plan can be carried out, for I fear we shall be frozen in long before reaching Forty Mile. I heard one of the clerks at the Redoubt bet that we would not reach Nulato."

"Yes, I, Simon Goldollar, made that bet, and I am willing to repeat it. I hope they won't get to Forty Mile. If they don't we'll head them off yet, and teach them that none but the company can trade on the Yukon. I am one of the company's most trusted clerks, and though I only came out last summer, I think I see a way to winning promotion by breaking up the plans of this impudent would-be trader in our territory, and I am going to propose my scheme to the agent at once. I am the more anxious to carry it out now that Phil Ryder, whom I hate, has turned up again, and is evidently some sort of a partner in this new concern. He thinks I stole his money when we crossed the continent together, but I didn't. Even if I had we would now be quits, for he has stolen the fur-seal's tooth from

me. I know where it is, though, and I'll have it back before long. I'll find some chance to get the best of him, too, before he leaves the Yukon, and I'll give him cause to regret that he ever saw it or Redoubt St. Michaels, either. See if I don't."

"At last I am allowed to speak, and I must say I think I should have been the first to be presented, for I am the Fur-seal's Tooth. My origin is mysterious, the wonderful carving with which I am covered is unique, and of course my ultimate fate cannot be foretold; but whoever has read of me in the book that bears my name must admit that I exert a powerful influence over the affairs of men. It is said of me that he who gives me away gives good luck with me. He who receives me as a gift receives good luck. He who loses me loses his luck, and he who steals me steals bad luck that will cling to him so long as I am retained in his possession.

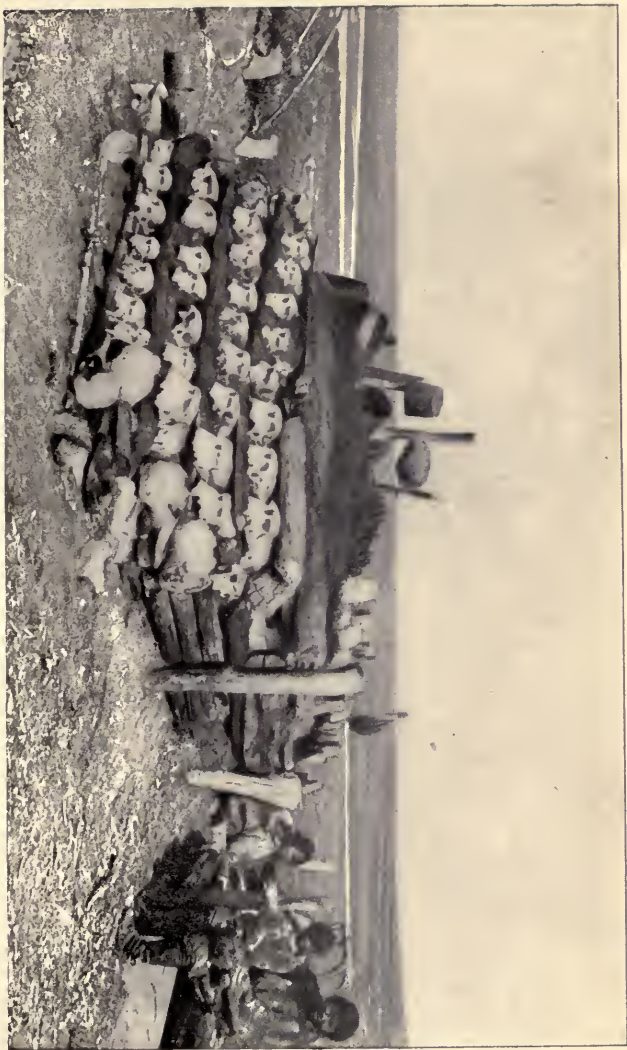
"Although I am now in the hands of a wretched Eskimo, I propose to leave him very shortly, to continue my travels until I reach my proper resting-place, and to exert a very considerable influence upon the forthcoming story. If you doubt my word, just bear me in mind and watch for my appearance."

CHAPTER II

A DANGEROUS BERTH OFF YUKON MOUTH

EIGHTY miles south of Redoubt St. Michaels, the one lonely trading-station of that bleak northern coast, the mighty Yukon pours forth its turbid flood, discoloring the waters of Bering Sea for one hundred miles off shore. In point of size, as measured by length, the Yukon ranks seventeenth among the rivers of the world and fifth among those of the United States, but its volume of water is computed to be equal to that of the Mississippi, while, like the Father of Waters, it is constantly eating away its own banks and tearing them down, acres at a time, along its entire length. Thus it has become a shoal stream of immense width, crowded with islands and sand-bars, on all of which are huge stacks of bleached driftwood piled up by spring-time floods. In the neighborhood of its fan-like, many-mouthed delta the tawny giant has deposited its muddy sediment for so many ages that it has created hundreds of square miles of low swamp lands, on which only coarse grasses and stunted willows grow. In the early summer these vast swamps afford safe breeding-places for millions of swans, ducks, and geese. Here also are produced such incredible swarms of mosquitoes that neither human beings nor animals dare penetrate their watery solitudes. Nor are mosquitoes confined to the Yukon delta ; but its entire valley is so infested with them that summer is a season to be dreaded by whites and natives alike. Even the wild animals of its forests

ESKIMO HUT, MOUTH OF THE YUKON





retreat to the snow-clad mountains, so that there is little or no game to be procured between spring and autumn. The only compensation of the season is that it brings the finest salmon of the world into the river in such vast shoals that every dweller within one hundred miles of its banks may from them lay in his year's supply of food by the labor of a single month.

In the summer, too, the four or five trade-boats—all light-draught, stern-wheeled steamers like the *Chimo*—that ply on the river make their annual trips, with provisions, goods, and an eight months' accumulation of mail, carrying joy to lonely mission-stations and trading-posts, native villages, and distant mining-camps. On their return in the fall they are freighted with gold-dust and the spoils of the most prolific fur-producing district now left to the world.

These things formed the principal topics of conversation in the pilot-house of the sturdy little *Chimo* as, aided by a strong north wind, she swept down the desolate coast of Norton Sound. The six-by-seven-foot enclosure was occupied by Gerald Hamer, the stalwart leader of the expedition, by Phil and Serge, and by an Eskimo pilot, who had been obtained at St. Michaels. The two boys were in there for warmth, for the season was late September, which in that latitude is very close to the beginning of winter, and the brisk north wind held so keen an edge that no one remained on deck unless forced to do so.

Gerald Hamer was there to watch his native pilot, in whom he had little confidence. He was also uneasy concerning his boat, which had been put together in the greatest haste on the beach, just beyond the Redoubt, in the face of all possible annoyance from its inmates; they being devoted to the cause of the already established company, were determined that no

other trader should gain a foothold in the country if they could prevent it.

Being anxious to obtain the good-will of the natives from the outset, Gerald Hamer had allowed a number of them who dwelt in the Yukon delta, and were desirous of returning home, to take passage on the *Chimo*, which towed their walrus-skin bidarrahs, or open boats, behind her. These passengers—men, women, and children, fat, greasy, and happy—made themselves perfectly at home on the lower or cargo deck of the steamer, sprawling over her freight, peering inquisitively at her engine, and revelling in the combined odors of steam and oil pervading that part of the boat.

Before half the distance down the coast was covered, mysterious accidents began to happen to the machinery. First it came to a stop, and the engineer reported that something had so seriously gone wrong that it would be necessary to anchor while he made an examination. To the horror and dismay of all hands, a gunny sack was found to be stuffed so far into the exhaust that the pipe had to be taken apart before the obstruction could be reached and removed. Not long after this danger was averted, one of the pumps refused to work. It was taken to pieces, and was found to contain a large nail, which must have been recently dropped into it. There was no doubt but that these things had been done intentionally; and as suspicion naturally fell on the native passengers, some of whom were known to be in the employ of the old company, Gerald Hamer finally ordered them to leave the steamer.

Not understanding the cause of this peremptory order, and being loath to exchange their present comfortable quarters for the open boats, the natives obeyed so slowly and sulkily that it almost seemed as though they were about to insist on remaining aboard. At length,

however, all were gone except one woman, who held a child in her arms, and who refused to leave the warm corner of which she had taken possession.

Determined to get rid of her, and despairing of moving her by other means, Gerald Hamer suddenly snatched the child from her arms, ran to the open gangway, and dropped it gently into a bidarra that still waited alongside. In an instant the mother had followed, and could be seen as the boat was shoved off hugging the infant to her bosom, at the same time darting furious glances after the departing steamer. A minute later, as though in compliance with her evident though unexpressed wish, the *Chimo* was run hard and fast aground on one of the innumerable bars that so jealously guard Yukon mouth. Her native steersman had been leaning from the pilot-house door watching the dismissal of his compatriots, and especially that of his own wife and baby, as the last two put off afterwards proved to be, instead of attending to his duty.

Phil, who remained in the pilot-house, saw the bank just before the boat struck, and snatched the wheel hard over, at the same time signalling to stop and back at full speed. But it was all too late, and ere she could be stopped the *Chimo* had slid half her length into the treacherous mud. In another minute the fleet of bidarras swept by, and from them came mocking laughter mingled with derisive shouts. One of them ran alongside, and ere any one on the steamer knew what was taking place the native pilot had deserted his post, and was being borne away in triumph by his fellows.

"I only hope nothing worse will come of it," said Phil, anxiously, when Gerald Hamer finally rejoined him in the pilot-house.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, the pilot said something about that baby

having the measles, which I understand have been pretty bad on the river this summer, and if that is the case some of us may have caught them."

"Oh, I guess there's no danger," replied the captain, carelessly, his mind at that moment being too fully occupied with the condition of his vessel to allow of other thoughts.

It was too late to do anything that evening, for the short Northern day was already merged in dusk, and the next morning, though anchors were carried out astern, they came home through the soft mud as if it were so much water the moment a strain was put on them. Sheer-poles were rigged, and an attempt was made to pry the boat off by means of them; but again the mud offered so little resistance that the effort only resulted in failure. So, after working like beavers for hours, the *Chimo's* crew resigned themselves to waiting as patiently as might be for a change of wind and higher water.

In this enforced delay three precious days were spent, and nightfall of the third found the *Chimo* still outside Yukon mouth instead of one hundred miles or more inland, as had been hoped. Still, with so energetic a leader as Gerald Hamer, those three days were by no means wasted. He overhauled and restowed the cargo hurriedly put on board at St. Michaels, and with the engineer made a thorough examination of the machinery. He reorganized his slender crew, appointing Phil and Serge first and second mates, and giving each charge of a watch.

Besides the captain, the two mates, and the engineer, there were three other persons in the crew. Two of them were millwrights, who were going to Forty Mile to set up the saw-mill that formed part of the *Chimo's* cargo, but who now served as firemen. The third was a sullen-faced fellow named Strengel, who had been



THE NATIVE PILOT DESERTS HIS POST

engaged from the steamer *Norsk*, which brought the expedition to St. Michaels, to act as assistant engineer. Phil took a dislike to this fellow from the first, and it was strengthened by the fact that he seemed to have contracted an intimacy with some of the inmates of the Redoubt, who were avowed enemies of the expedition.

Besides doing the things already mentioned, the captain and his two young mates took a small boat and staked out about ten miles of the channel that the *Chimo* would follow as soon as she again floated.

On the evening of the third day the wind changed, and as the steamer would probably float during the night the captain ordered steam to be got up and everything made ready for a start at daylight. He turned in early, complaining of great weariness and many pains, which he attributed to the cold and the frequent drenchings that had accompanied his sounding of the channel.

The following morning, when Phil went to report that the steamer was afloat, and also to make a grave charge against Assistant Engineer Strenzel, he was horrified to find the captain raving in the delirium of a high fever. Thus to his intense dismay the young mate suddenly found himself burdened with the entire responsibility of the expedition, with both a mutiny and a very sick man on his hands, in an unfriendly country, and about to be confronted with the terrors of an arctic winter.

CHAPTER III

MEASLES AND MUTINY

As Phil realized the full gravity of the situation he instinctively shrank from assuming the responsibility so unexpectedly thrust upon him. One of his aunt Ruth's long-ago stories of a poor little bear who found himself alone in the great big world with all his troubles before him flashed into the boy's mind, and he said to himself, "This little bear's troubles have met him, sure enough, and in full force."

But why should he assume this responsibility? This was not his expedition, and he had no interest in it save that of a passenger. It did not seem at all likely that it could succeed now, and as they must apparently return to St. Michaels sooner or later, why not do so at once, and get out of this scrape the easiest way possible. Or why not turn the whole business over to Mr. Sims, the engineer, who was well paid for his work, and who was supposed to have counted the cost of failure as well as of success. Yes, that was the thing to do: shift the responsibility to Mr. Sims, who was paid for assuming such duties.

But hold on, Phil Ryder! Have you not also been paid, at the very highest rate too, by the man who now lies so helpless before you, and whose fortunes are in your hands? Did he not rescue you from a certain death out there in those cold, cruel waters, when your bidarkie was on the point of foundering? Did you not gladly accept his offer to accompany him

on this trip when all appeared smooth sailing? Have you not been fed and clothed at his expense? Above all, has he not proved his confidence in you by appointing you to a position of trust? Are such things as gratitude and loyalty unknown to you? You were proud to be called first mate yesterday, and now you shrink from performing the first and most evident duty of the office. You owe everything to Gerald Hamer, and yet you would intrust his fortunes to a man whom you know to be a drunkard whenever liquor is within his reach, and on whose movements the captain bade you keep a close watch. Shame on you, Phil Ryder! What would Serge say if you should do this cowardly thing? Would you ever dare face his honest gaze again?

These thoughts, which flashed through Phil's mind in a few seconds, stung him as though they had been so many clearly uttered words. The hot blood rushed to his cheeks, and with a very determined look on his face the lad walked forward. He found Serge in the pilot-house, and at once laid the situation before him. In conclusion, he said:

“We must make some move at once, for this westerly wind is kicking up such a sea that our anchors won't hold much longer. It would be even more dangerous to attempt a return to St. Michaels than to lie here. Besides that, to place ourselves at the mercy of our enemies for the winter would mean the utter ruin of the expedition and the loss to Gerald Hamer of every cent he has in the world. So, under the circumstances, as the present command of this craft seems to devolve on me, I propose to continue on our course, get rid of that fellow Strengel at the first opportunity, and push on up the river until our farther progress is barred by ice, or until we discover a good place in which to lay the boat up for the winter. We must

surely find white men somewhere who will help us, too."

"Yes," replied Serge, "we are certain to if we can only get as far as the Anvik Mission. At any rate, Phil, what you propose to do is exactly the right thing, and you can count on me to back you up to the last gasp."

"I knew I could, old man," replied Phil, warmly. "Now let's go below and make ready to start."

Calling on the two millwrights to follow them, Phil and Serge made their way to the engine-room, where they found the engineer just rousing from a heavy sleep, which Phil strongly suspected had been aided by liquor.

"Mr. Sims," said he, "what would be the effect if a cylinder-head should blow out under a full head of steam?"

"The effect?" replied the engineer, slowly, and evidently surprised at the question. "Why, any one who happened to be in range would be killed, all in this part of the boat would be more or less scalded, and the chances are that this expedition would come to a very sudden termination."

"Of course yours is all right?"

"Certainly; I examined it only yesterday," replied the engineer, testily. "Now, if you are through with your foolish questions, it seems to me you'd better notify the captain that everything is ready for a start. I don't want to waste steam by blowing off, and there's more on now than we ought to carry."

"Would you mind stepping this way a moment?" asked Phil, taking the engine-room lantern and holding it back of the cylinder.

Moved by curiosity as to what the young seal-hunter could be up to, the engineer stepped forward, gave one look, and uttered a cry of horror. More than half

the bolts holding the massive cylinder-head in place had been loosened.

"Upon my honor, I knew nothing of this thing, Mr. Ryder," he gasped.

"Of course you didn't," answered Phil, grimly; "for it was done while you were sleeping off the effect of those brandied peaches. Where is Strengel?"

"He is aft somewhere. But surely, Mr. Ryder, you don't suspect him of this dastardly act?"

"Go and tell him to come here," ordered Phil, turning to one of the millwrights.

In a moment the man returned, and reported that Strengel claimed to be too busy to come just then.

With an expressive glance at his friend, Phil left the engine-room, and Serge followed him. A minute later, in the resistless grasp of the two athletic young fellows, Mr. Strengel was being rushed along the deck so rapidly as to suggest that he had very imperative business in the engine-room.

"Here, gentlemen, is the man who did that thing!" cried Phil, as he gave the breathless and trembling wretch a shove that landed him in a corner.

"So help me, Mr. Ryder—" he began, abjectly.

"Shut up!" shouted Phil, "and don't you dare speak again until you are spoken to. There is no doubt of his guilt, gentlemen, for I saw him loosening those bolts as plainly as I see him now, when I came down here awhile ago to make ready for starting. He did not see me, for I was in darkness, while he worked by lantern-light. So I watched him for a full minute while he prepared this death-trap for the rest of us. No wonder he has sought the most distant and safest part of the ship ever since.

"Moreover, it is this man who, on two previous occasions, has attempted to cripple our machinery. He is employed by the old company to injure and delay

this expedition by every possible means. From the evidence before us it looks as though he would not hesitate to commit murder to accomplish his designs. Now, gentlemen, what, in your opinion, ought to be done with such a bit of scum?"

"Shoot him! Throw him overboard!" suggested two of the little group in a breath, while Serge said nothing, but tightened his clutch of the prisoner's collar ominously.

"Turn him over to the captain," said the engineer; "he'll settle the case in a hurry."

"That is what I started to do, and what I am afraid of," replied Phil. "The captain has sworn to shoot on sight the first man he catches tampering with the machinery of this boat, and I don't believe he'd hesitate a moment before doing it, either. At the same time, gentlemen, we don't want to have any bloodshed on the *Chimo* if we can help it. It would not only give her a bad name and injure our prospects on the river, but would furnish us with a cause of regret for the rest of our lives. So I thought I would ask your opinion before reporting this affair to the captain.

"My plan would be to get under way as quietly as possible, which the captain ordered me to do anyway, if we were afloat at daylight, and run over to the Pastolik wood-yard. There we'll give the scoundrel a chance to slip ashore and hide himself. He'll be picked up fast enough by the natives who own the yard. We won't make any stop there, but will run on up our staked channel and be out of sight before anything is said to the captain. Thus we shall get rid of our murderer without having his blood on our hands, and at the same time leave him where there won't be the slightest chance of his troubling us any more. In fact, I'm inclined to think that if he once gets safely out of this boat, he'll be wise enough never to come near her

“HERE IS THE MAN WHO DID THAT THING”



again. I shall be sorry for him if he does, that's all."

After some discussion, during which the wretched prisoner watched the faces of his judges with painful eagerness, this plan was accepted. Under strictest supervision of the engineer, Strengel was made to repair his own mischief. Then with Serge to keep careful watch of affairs on the lower deck, and with Phil at the wheel, the *Chimo* steamed away from the place of her long detention. As she neared the Pastolik wood-yard Strengel was not only ready to leap ashore at the first opportunity, but he was warned by the angry mutterings of those about him that to remain on board a moment longer than was necessary would place his life in imminent jeopardy.

So, as the steamer rubbed against the bank, he made a leap ; his bag was flung after him, and, without having come to a full stop, the *Chimo* moved on, Phil ringing the jingle-bell for full speed the moment it was safe to do so.

It is hard to say which was the more pleased at this successful termination of the affair : Phil to be so easily rid of a dangerous member of his crew, or the wretch who had so easily escaped a well-merited punishment.

As soon as the steamer again reached the staked channel, Phil resigned the wheel to Serge, and, calling on the two millwrights to aid him, removed the stricken captain to the lower deck. There a bed had been prepared for him in a warm corner, near the boiler, which was carefully curtained by tarpaulins against any draught of cold air. Although the young mate had but slight knowledge of sickness, and was still uncertain as to the nature of Gerald Hamer's illness, he knew that warmth would do his patient no harm, and that in a case of measles it was necessary to a successful treatment of the disease.

CHAPTER IV

PHIL ASSUMES COMMAND AND ASSERTS HIS AUTHORITY

THERE was much alarm among the scanty crew of the *Chimo* when the pitiable state of their leader was discovered, and the engineer was especially loud in his protests against attempting to continue the voyage under such discouraging conditions. He declared that none but madmen would think of doing such a thing, and that unless they immediately returned to St. Michaels they would all perish in that wilderness of icy water and frozen mud. At first the millwrights, who had heretofore had no experience in rough travel, were inclined to agree with him ; but Phil stated his view of the situation so clearly, and was so sturdily supported by Serge, that they were finally won over to his way of thinking. So the discontented engineer was forced to yield to the wishes of the majority.

Five miles from Pastolik they stopped at the Eskimo village of Coatlik for a supply of wood, and here Serge, with his ability to speak Russian, proved invaluable. Not only did he conduct the wood negotiations, but he succeeded in purchasing a number of freshly killed wild-geese, which were at that time flying southward in vast flocks. Above all, he secured a native pilot, who promised to go with them until they met running ice.

Nor did the services of the young Russo-American diminish one whit in value after Coatlik was left behind. He alone knew how to prepare the broths

which formed the sole nourishment that the sick man was able to take. He only could converse with the native pilot, and learn from him the mysteries of the mighty river. He it was who was always cheerful, and could swing the lustiest axe, when, as often happened, they were obliged to renew their supply of fuel from chance drift piles; and it was he who must attend the sick man at night, because the faintest murmur served to wake him. So Serge was the very life of that dreary voyage, and but for him Phil knew it must have been abandoned long before they reached the haven for which they were steering.

And it was a dreary voyage. Day after day witnessed the same monotony of turbid waters, so widespread that one bank was often invisible from the other, and a deadly level of drowned lands bounded only by the low, far-away horizon. Day after day brought the same gray skies, chill winds, rain squalls, and flurries of snow. Every night saw heavy frosts, and it grew hourly more apparent that the stern reign of winter was close at hand.

At long intervals lonely groups of sod-covered huts gave sign that human beings dwelt even in those unlovely wastes, but save for fuel the young commander of the *Chimo* would not pause to make their acquaintance. From earliest dawn until dusk he forced the little craft at full speed against the swift current, often grounding on sand-bars in spite of the native pilot, whose only knowledge was of the best channel but not of its obstructions.

After two days they began to see low hills on the north, and on this side the river-bank became noticeably higher. Although this was encouraging, it produced but slight impression on the spirits of the depressed crew, whose situation was indeed becoming alarming. They were worn out with anxiety, over-

work, and insufficient food, for they had neither the time nor inclination to do any cooking except for the sick. The captain lay in a state of semi-stupor, and another cot within the same enclosure held one of the millwrights, who had been stricken with the dread disease twenty-four hours later.

By the end of the first week in October they were some two hundred miles from the mouth of the river, with nearly one hundred yet to go before they could reach Anvik, to gain which Phil was directing all his energies. He knew not what they would find there; but he had an intuition that help of some kind awaited them at that point. At any rate, he was determined to reach it somehow.

On the 7th of October ice began to run in the river, and with its first appearance the native pilot insisted upon starting back towards his now distant home. That night, amid the howlings of a tempest that threatened to tear the *Chimo* from her anchorage, the stricken millwright died.

When Phil went to the engineer's room to report this distressing news he was filled with wrath to find that individual lying in his bunk and indulging to excess in the contents of a case of brandied peaches that he had stolen from the cargo.

Without a word Phil picked up the case and flung it into the river. "I'll see you again in the morning, sir, when you are sober," he said, as he left the room, and, locking the door, put the key in his own pocket.

That night of storm, death, and despair was one that neither Phil nor Serge will ever forget. For long hours they sat by the bedside of the captain, whom they believed to be sleeping, discussing in low tones their melancholy situation.

Suddenly they were startled by a voice from the

sick man, who said, feebly, "Get me to Anvik, boys, if you can, and you will save my life."

It was the first time he had spoken rationally for several days, and they had no idea that he was even conscious of their presence; but Phil answered, promptly, "All right, captain; we'll get you there, never fear."

"Yes," added Serge, cheerily, "you may rest easy, sir, for when Phil uses that tone he means just what he says, and I know that I've got to back him up."

Neither of the lads got more than an hour's sleep that night, and long before daylight they were again at work. Phil and the surviving millwright were getting up steam, while Serge was taking unusual pains in preparing breakfast, for they all realized that they must now lay in an extra supply of strength.

Not until breakfast was ready was Mr. Sims released from the confinement of his room. After eating his meal in sullen silence he said to Phil, "Well, young man, what do you propose to do to-day?"

"I propose to push on up the river as usual."

"And who are you going to get to run your engine?"

"I expect you to do it, sir."

"Well, you are expecting a good deal more than you'll get," cried the man, rising from the table in his excitement. "I've been bullied by a parcel of boys just as long as I intend to be; so now I want you to understand that I'll not allow the engine of this boat to make another turn except to run her into winter-quarters, and that's got to be done in a hurry, too."

"That's exactly what I mean to do with her," replied Phil, quietly.

"Where?"

"At Anvik, less than one hundred miles from here."

"Hundred nothing!" screamed the man. "You'll

put her in winter-quarters within ten miles of this very spot or not at all; for you can't run the engine, and you haven't got a man aboard except me who can, and you know it."

The furious man had stepped towards Phil, and was shaking a trembling fist in the lad's face as he shouted these last words. Serge stood close behind him.

Just then the young mate nodded his head; both lads sprang upon the man at once, and in spite of his fierce struggles bore him to the deck. In another moment he was securely and helplessly bound.

"How do we generally dispose of mutineers aboard this ship?" asked Phil, as he regained his feet.

"Set 'em ashore, sir, and leave 'em to shift for themselves," answered Serge, grimly.

"Very well; and as we haven't any time to lose, you may get the dingey overboard at once. Call Isaac to help you, and tell him the reason for this extra work."

"You don't dare do it," muttered the prostrate man, as Serge started to obey this order.

"Don't I?" queried Phil. "If you think so you must be ignorant of what constitutes a mutiny, as well as of the powers vested in the captain of a ship."

"But you aren't the captain of this ship."

"Perhaps I'm not. At the same time I am acting as captain by authority of the owner, and I am performing all of a captain's duties; *all* of them, you understand."

By this time the small boat was alongside, and leaving the bewildered millwright in her, Serge regained the deck, where he awaited further instructions.

"Select such of your belongings as you wish to take with you, and they shall be put into the boat," said Phil.

"Oh, rats!" cried the man, angrily.

"Take hold of him!" ordered the mate.

Serge obeyed, and in another minute the mutinous engineer found himself in the small boat, which was actually being shoved off.

"Shall I hunt a native village to leave him at?" asked Serge.

"No. We haven't time for that. Land him wherever it happens."

"Look here, boys," said the man, humbly, as he cast a shuddering glance over the icy waters and at the bleak desolation of the shore beyond. "I weaken. Take me back, and I'll go to work."

"Will you run the engine as far as Anvik?"

"I'll run her till you give the word to stop."

"And promise on your honor not to touch another drop of liquor before this steamer is laid up in winter-quarters?"

"Yes."

So that was the end of the mutiny, and once more the *Chimo* held her way up the great river, whose swift current was now covered with floating ice as far as the eye could reach.

Late that afternoon a new bewilderment confronted the anxious lads. They were involved in a labyrinth of channels, all of about the same width, and apparently pouring forth equal volumes of water. But while they all looked equally inviting, only one was that of the main river; the others were mouths of the great Shagelook slough, which would lead them into an unknown wilderness. One meant safety and the others disaster. But which was which?

In this dilemma Phil decided to anchor and wait for another daylight. While they thus waited—wearied, anxious, and wellnigh despairing—there came a shout from out of the darkness that thrilled them with a new life, for the words were in their own tongue.

“Steamer ahoy! ahoy! Hello on board the steamer!” rang cheerily from off the dark waters.

“Hello! hello! Come this way!” answered Phil from the pilot-house.

CHAPTER V

A PARSON AT THE WHEEL

PHIL had been sitting alone in the pilot-house, where, in the chill darkness, the weight of his responsibility seemed almost too great to be borne. He had held out bravely until this moment, but now it seemed as though a great black wall of difficulty were reared against him, and that it was gradually enclosing him on all sides. The many channels revealed by the waning light of that day must all be explored ere the right one could be determined. Phil dared not consider how many days might thus be spent, for he knew he had no days nor even hours to spare.

At any moment now the river might close, and once caught in the relentless fetters of its ice the *Chimo* must remain motionless until crushed and swept away by the resistless fury of the spring floods. In the meantime what would become of her little company, stranded there in the open river, exposed to the full fury of arctic blasts, remote from human habitation, and equally so from any visible supply of fuel? They had not even the fur clothing without which none may spend a winter in that region.

To be sure, as soon as the ice would bear them they might make their way to some wretched native village, and there drag out a miserable existence during the long winter months. Even in that sorry retreat there could be no hope for Gerald Hamer, who must either be left behind to perish, or taken with them to meet an equally

certain fate from exposure. As poor Phil reflected on these things he asked himself why he had so obstinately forced the expedition farther and farther into the wilderness, day after day, until he had at length brought it to this danger point. Why had he not laid the boat up in the first winter harbor that offered? He could remember that they had passed several very good ones, some of which were in the vicinity of Eskimo villages.

Why? Because he had made up his mind to reach Anvik, and declared his intention of doing so, and his Yankee grit was not of the kind to be daunted by obstacles nor turned back by them from an uncompleted duty. Why? Because he had promised Captain Hamer to carry him to Anvik. Phil Ryder did not often make promises, being opposed to them on general principles, but when he did make one he kept it. Why? Because while he was thus thinking, that cheery voice came ringing out of the darkness, bringing with it such a thrill of hope and relief that just to hear it was worth all the toil and anxiety expended in reaching that point.

Serge was down in the galley cooking supper, and whistling a melancholy little tune, that tried its best to sound cheerful as he did so. Poor Isaac, the millwright, homesick, grief-stricken, and despairing, was working by lantern-light on a rude coffin for his dead comrade. Mr. Sims, morose and silent, was busy with his machinery, while Gerald Hamer tossed wearily but weakly beneath the piled-up coverings of his narrow bed.

All heard the first shout of that unknown voice, and each suspended operations to listen. When it came again, and they heard Phil's answering hail, all rushed to the gangway on that side, that is, all except the sick man, and there, holding flashing lanterns to guide



W. T. Rogers

THE ARRIVAL OF THE UNKNOWN

him, they excitedly awaited the approach of the unknown.

While they peered vaguely into the gloom, listening for the slatting of sails or the rattle of oars, he suddenly swept alongside, seated in an Eskimo kyak or skin boat, very similar to the one in which Phil and Serge had made their perilous voyage on Bering Sea a month before, only much smaller.

They could see that he was a white man, wearing a thick, close-cut brown beard; but otherwise he might easily have been mistaken for a native, so completely was he enveloped in a kamleika. The hood of this was drawn over his head, while its ample skirts were fastened to the coaming of the hatch in which he sat, so as to prevent the entrance of water.

"Well, if this isn't a bit of good-fortune, then I don't know what good-fortune is!" he exclaimed, smiling up at the eager faces peering at him from the steamer's side. "May I come aboard?"

"May you come aboard?" cried Phil. "Well, sir, I rather think you may, for even if you didn't want to, I am afraid we should capture you and drag you on board by force. Why, we couldn't be more delighted to see you if you were the President of the United States himself."

"I doubt if you can be half as happy to see me as I am to meet with you thus fortunately and unexpectedly," laughed the stranger.

"In that case," replied Phil, "you must be the very happiest person in the world, for you have made me almost that."

During this interchange of courtesies the stranger had been unlashng his kamleika, and now, stepping lightly from his fragile craft, he gained the deck, to which his kyak was also lifted.

"Ah! but this is cosey and comfortable," he remarked,

as he entered the well-lighted mess-room, which opened from the galley and was warmed by its glowing stove. Serge had just finished his preparations for supper, and the well-laden mess-table did indeed present a sight calculated to cheer the heart of a hungry man, especially one who had been for hours battling with the ice of an Alaskan river.

“You gentlemen seem to be travelling and living like princes,” continued the stranger; “but I must confess to considerable surprise at finding you on the river so late in the season. You are bound down and out, I presume?”

“No, sir,” answered Phil, “we are bound up the river, and hope to reach Anvik before it closes.”

“Anvik!” cried the stranger. “Why, that is the place to which I also am going.”

“Alone, at night, and in a bidarkie?” asked Phil, incredulously.

“Yes,” laughed the other, “though I was only trying to cross the river to-night for fear it might close before morning, and leave me stranded on the farther bank. It was a reckless thing to undertake, I acknowledge, and but for your timely presence I might have come to serious grief ere this. It had grown so dark before I sighted your lights that I could no longer avoid the floating ice, and was in great fear that my boat would be cut open. You may believe, then, that I was glad to see them. Now, to find myself seated among those of my own race, and at a civilized table after a rather trying experience of Eskimo hospitality, caps the climax and renders my content complete.”

“Are you on a hunting or fishing trip, sir?” asked Phil, anxious to establish the status of this new acquaintance.

“Neither, just now,” was the laconic answer.

“Trading, perhaps?”

"Not exactly."

"Travelling for pleasure?"

"Yes, so far as it is a pleasure to do my work."

"Prospecting?"

"For some things, though not for gold."

"In government employ?"

"No."

"Working for the company, perhaps?"

"If you mean for the fur-trading company, I am not."

Phil was nonplussed, and knew not what to ask next. In fact, but for the stranger's affable manner and quizzical smile he would not have pushed his inquiries so far as he had. Finally he said: "I need not ask if you are a good boatman, for any one who can manage a bidarkie as well as you do must be that. I do want to make one more inquiry, though, and I hope you will excuse my inquisitiveness, but we are in distress and greatly need assistance. Are you a Yukon pilot?"

"For that part of the river lying between here and Anvik I am," replied the stranger. "In fact, I know it so well that I would not hesitate to run it in the dark. Furthermore, to satisfy your very proper curiosity concerning an utter stranger, who has forced himself upon your hospitality, I will say that I am a trader, a prospector, a fisherman, a hunter, a boatman, a mechanic, a writer, a teacher, something each of a lawyer, a physician, and a surgeon; and, above all, I am a preacher of the Word of God, for I am a missionary of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and stationed at Anvik."

"Oh, sir, are you, really?" cried Phil. "Then you are the very man I have wanted most to meet. Had I not heard that you were at Anvik, and believed you would help us, I don't think I should have dared bring

the boat even as far as I have. I was trying to make up my mind what to do next, and had almost decided not to attempt a further ascent of the river, but to go into the best winter-quarters we could find to-morrow. You see we are all mixed up as to the channels, and greatly afraid of being caught by the ice."

"As well you may be," replied the missionary. "But, pardon my curiosity, you speak of bringing the boat to this place as though you were her captain. Is that the case?"

"No," replied Phil, with a flush. "I am only her first mate, while Serge here is second, and Mr. Sims is engineer. But I am acting as captain during the illness of our real captain, Mr. Gerald Hamer, who is down with the measles."

"Indeed?" said the missionary, gravely. "I am very sorry to hear that, for in this climate, especially, measles is a serious sickness and has been a terrible scourge on the river. I have just been spending a few days at one of the Shagelook villages installing a native teacher in place of one who died of measles a few weeks ago. How long has your captain been ill?"

"Since the day we entered the river."

"And do you mean to say that you have navigated the steamer all this distance without help?"

"Oh no, sir! I have had the help of Serge, who is a capital sailor and can talk Russian besides, and of Mr. Sims, who is a first-class engineer, and of Isaac, who is a millwright, but who makes one of the best firemen I ever saw, and we had another millwright, only he died last night, and a native pilot part of the way."

"Well, you have certainly shown an immense amount of pluck and perseverance," exclaimed the missionary, "and I don't think I know another boy of your age who would have done as well, for you don't

look as though you were out of your teens yet. Are you?"

"Almost," answered Phil, again flushing. "That is, I shall be in two years more."

"And Serge?"

"He is almost as old as I am."

"How about Isaac?"

"Oh, Isaac is most twenty."

"Well, Mr. Sims," said the missionary, turning to the engineer, I congratulate you on your crew.

"Yes," assented the man, gruffly, "they're a pretty plucky lot of boys. We've been mighty short-handed, though, since the cap'n took sick, and Martin died, and my assistant was set ashore for mutiny, and I for one am powerful glad to see another white man come on board, even if he is a parson."

Smiling at this equivocal compliment, the missionary asked if he might visit the captain, and was conducted by Phil to the sick man's bedside. As they came away he said to the young mate: "Your captain is dangerously ill, and the sooner you get him to Anvik, where there is a doctor, the better. Therefore I would advise you to up anchor and make the run to-night, especially as I fear the river may close before morning."

CHAPTER VI

FLOATING ICE AND "CHY"

HAPPY to share his responsibility with the stranger who had been so providentially sent to their relief, Phil willingly agreed to his proposal, and ordered the *Chimo* to be again got under way. The night was clear, cold, and still; but there was no moon, and its darkness was only dissipated in a measure by brilliant starlight. This, however, was sufficient to disclose the outline of the western bank, which the new pilot kept always in sight. He seemed actually to be able to feel his way up the mighty river, avoiding false channels and sandbars as if by instinct, and never hesitating as to which side of an island he ought to pass. Phil occupied the pilot-house with him, and after a long silence he exclaimed, admiringly, "You surely must have been a steamboat man, sir, before you became a missionary."

"No," laughed the other, "I never was on a river steamer until I came out here, though as a boy I did have some experience in running up and down Lake Champlain, near which I lived."

"In New York State?" asked Phil.

"No; in Vermont, not very far from Burlington. So, you see, I am a genuine Yankee."

"I might have known it," said Phil, "from your handiness at all sorts of things. I wonder why it is that, as a rule, the Yankee is such a Jack-at-all-trades?"

"I suppose it is because he is generally taught by

necessity in the shape of poverty," replied the missionary; "and even if he were not so taught at home, he certainly would be out here, where a man must be able to do nearly everything for himself or leave it undone."

"Jalap Coombs was a Yankee," meditated Phil, "that is, when he didn't feel that he was a subject, and he could do more kinds of things than any one I ever knew. How I wish he were with us at this very minute! I don't believe we could get into any scrape or trouble that he wouldn't manage to get us out of somehow."

"Is he dead?" asked the missionary.

"No, indeed. That is, I hope not, though he might as well be so far as we are concerned, for I don't suppose we shall ever see him again. We left him on Oonimak Island, Serge and I did, and now I suppose he is in Sitka or Victoria or San Francisco, or perhaps bound for the other side of the world."

Being thus started on the subject of Jalap Coombs, Phil proceeded to give his new friend an account of their recent adventures in Bering Sea, and of the prominent part taken in them by the Yankee mate of the sealer *Seamew*, in all of which the new-comer was deeply interested. While Phil was in the midst of an account of how Serge obtained fire from brimstone and feathers, the second mate himself appeared to report that their stock of fuel was nearly exhausted.

"Then we must stop at Makagamoot for a new supply," said the missionary pilot, promptly, "though I fear we may have trouble in getting the natives to turn out at this time of night; still, with your permission, Captain Ryder, I think we would better try it."

"Certainly, sir," agreed Phil; and so the *Chimo*, being somewhere in the vicinity of the invisible Eskimo settlement at that very moment, was headed for the west bank of the river. Her whistle was sounded

vigorously at short intervals, to attract attention, and in a few minutes her crew had the satisfaction of seeing a glow of fire-light on the beach not more than a mile ahead. At the same time there came an ominous crunching of ice, and all hands instantly realized that inshore the river was already frozen over. The ice was not yet thick enough to stop them, though it materially impeded their progress; they finally succeeded in reaching the bank.

At first the few sleepy natives who came, out of curiosity, to witness the unusual sight of a steamboat at that time of night and thus late in the season, were disinclined to do any work before morning; but the appearance among them of the missionary, and a few words from him, produced a magical change in their attitude. Five minutes later a long line containing every able-bodied man in the settlement was formed from the steamer to the wood-pile, and a steady stream of cord-wood sticks, passed from hand to hand, was flowing aboard.

Within half an hour every inch of wood room was filled, the natives were made glad by double the pay they had ever received for a similar amount of work, and the *Chimo* was backing out of the channel she had made for herself towards open water.

Only fifteen miles now lay between her and Anvik, and though the night had grown bitterly cold, her pilot held out hopes that they might still make the run without being nipped in the rapidly forming ice.

Under every pound of steam that her boiler would bear, the sturdy little craft quivered to her very keel as she ploughed through the black waters, grinding the floating ice-cakes beneath her bow, tossing them to one side, or beating them to fragments with her powerful wheel. Leaving the missionary alone in the pilot-house, Phil worked with Serge and Isaac at heav-

ing wood into the roaring furnace. In face of its fervent heat it was hard for them to realize that the night was cold, and much less that the mercury stood close to zero.

But the silent figure grasping the frigid spokes up in the pilot-house knew it, and his anxiety increased with each slow-dragging hour. Was it indeed too late to reach a safe winter haven? Had he been too officious and self-confident? He almost feared so, and said as much to Phil when the young mate came up to inquire how many miles more they had to go.

"Not a bit of it, sir," cried the lad, with all his old cheery confidence fully restored. "Why, you not only rescued us from a regular slough of despond, but from the imminent danger of being frozen in where we were as well. If you hadn't come along we should certainly have stayed there until morning, in which case it is plain enough now that the *Chimo* would have gone no farther this winter. Now you have at least brought us within reach of safety even if we shouldn't move another yard, and you have lifted a mighty heavy load of anxiety from my shoulders, I can tell you. But aren't we nearly there, sir? It seems as though we had come fifty miles instead of fifteen since we took on that wood."

"Yes, and if it were daylight, which it soon will be, we could see Anvik now. When we have made a couple more miles I shall head her into the ice. In the meantime I wish you would ask Serge to make me a pot of his hottest *chy*, for I am nearly perished with the cold."

"A pot of what?" asked Phil, thinking he must have misunderstood the word.

"Of *chy*. Tell him a *chy peet* is what I want. He will understand."

“Aye, aye, sir! *Chy* it is, and you shall have it if there’s a drop to be found aboard the boat.”

Serge laughed at the order, and hastened to fill it; while Phil followed him, curious to see what he would make.

“Why, that’s tea you are putting into the pot!” he exclaimed, a few minutes later.

“Certainly,” replied Serge; “*chy* is tea, and tea is *chy*, and the teapot is *chynik*, and *chy peet* is a lunch of tea and bread. So there’s a lesson in Russian that I know you won’t forget in a hurry. Now, if you will carry it up to him I will get back to the furnace door, for poor Isaac is just about used up.”

So the young captain acted as steward, and then, taking the wheel while his guest drank cup after cup of the scalding liquid, became quartermaster, and was finally restored to his original rank by having the missionary ask his permission to send the *Chimo* into the ice. “It may injure the hull somewhat,” he said, “and probably will; but we’ve either got to risk it or leave her to winter out here in the middle of the river; for we are abreast of Anvik now. You will see the houses in a few minutes, for dawn is close at hand.”

“Of course we must put her into the ice, and rush her just as far as she will go,” answered Phil. “We can afford to damage her hull to a very considerable extent better than we can afford to leave her out here to be crushed by the spring break-up of the ice.”

So in the first flush of morning the brave little boat was headed towards the western bank, and began directly to crash through the thin ice fringing the channel. For some distance she cut her way as though it had been so much window-glass; then her progress became slower and slower, until finally she came to a dead stop, though the big wheel was still lashing the turbid waters into foam behind her.

"Stop her! Back her! Stop her! Go ahead, full speed!" were the orders tapped out on the engine-room gong, and rushing at the ice with gathered headway, the *Chimo* crashed her way through it for a hundred yards farther. Again she was backed, and again charged the enemy with furious impetus. This time the shock was terrific, though she did not gain more than half the former distance. Again and again was the attack repeated, until finally she gained barely a length.

With the next shock the steamer climbed the ice, and ran nearly half her length out of water before the barrier broke with her weight, and set her once more afloat.

"That's all," said Phil, quietly. "We don't dare try that again. If we did we'd probably open every seam in her, even if we didn't break her back. So that's all we can do, and here is where the *Chimo* will have to lie for the winter. It's too bad, though, for we aren't more than a quarter of a mile from shore."

"I don't know about lying here all winter," replied the missionary. "I don't like it myself, and if you would rather have the boat close to the bank I guess we can manage to put her there."

"How?" asked Phil.

"You wait here and get breakfast while I go ashore on the ice. I won't be gone more than an hour, and when I come back I'll tell you," was the reply. "I shall bring the doctor with me, too."

CHAPTER VII

THE "CHIMO" GOES INTO WINTER-QUARTERS

WHILE Phil watched the departing missionary, who was making his way cautiously over the newly-formed ice, the late-rising sun appeared above the southeastern horizon, gilding a cross surmounting the tower of a little log-church pleasantly located on a high bluff. Back of it rose the dark-green wall of a spruce forest, while about it were clustered a number of low but very substantial and comfortable-looking log-houses. Near the beach at the foot of the bluff stood an Indian village of huts whose roofs bristled with poles. In each one was left a square hole for the egress of smoke from the open fire built on an earthen floor beneath.

Scattered about in picturesque but hopeless confusion were long ranges of pole frames for drying fish, many little log-houses mounted on stilts and looking like dove-cots, the use of which Phil could not imagine, fish-traps, boats, sledges, and everywhere dozens of yelping, prowling, fighting, or sleeping dogs. Besides these things Phil could see what appeared to be the black chimney-stack of some kind of a mill.

Suddenly a flag was run to the top of a tall pole on top of the bluff, and as the Stars and Stripes streamed out bravely in the cold wind a rattling volley of musketry rang forth its loud note of welcome from the Indian village. To this Phil responded by a vigorous salute from the *Chimo's* whistle. Then, so utterly

wearily from overwork, excitement, and loss of sleep that merely to move required a strong effort of will, he left the pilot-house and went below. He found Serge at the captain's bedside administering a bowl of broth and telling the sick man of the events of the night.

As Phil entered, Gerald Hamer's eyes rested on him with such an expression of gratitude as the former will never forget. "I thank you two boys," he said, weakly, "more than I can ever tell. To you I owe not only my life, but whatever it holds of value, and—" Here his voice failed him, and Serge bade him not to attempt another word.

"No, indeed," added Phil, "for you don't owe us one cent's worth of thanks, Mr. Hamer. To the end of our lives we shall always be in your debt, and in bringing you up the river to this point we have used your boat to bring ourselves as well. So—well, that's all there is to it, anyway; and now if you will only hurry up and get well we shall appreciate that more than all the thanks in the world."

Then Serge left, and Phil, slipping into his vacated chair, almost instantly fell into a sleep so profound that it is doubtful if a boiler explosion or an earthquake could have aroused him.

An hour or so later he was in the midst of a very perplexing dream, in which he seemed to be recovering from an illness, and the old family physician at his bedside kept changing into a young woman. While in the form of an old man he said, "Yes, there are the two captains, both evidently sound asleep, and no wonder. This is Captain Hamer, who would have died long ago but for the devoted care of the two lads, and this is Captain Ryder, who brought the boat up the river in the face of all obstacles."

Then, presto! the old doctor changed into a young

woman, who said, "Poor boy, I don't wonder that he has fallen asleep, and I only hope he isn't in for a spell of illness. He certainly appears feverish."

With this a soft hand was laid on Phil's forehead, and he opened his eyes to find his dream so far a reality that there actually was a young woman bending over him, and wearing an expression of anxiety on her pleasant face. Behind her stood the missionary.

She stepped back as she saw that Phil was awake, and the poor boy, recalling vividly his dishevelled appearance, struggled to his feet with a crimson face.

"I didn't know you were going to bring ladies to see us," he said in a reproachful tone to his companion of the night. "In fact, I didn't know there was a lady within a thousand miles of here. I'm sure you didn't mention the fact. You only said you were going to fetch the doctor."

"And so I have," laughed the missionary, "for this young lady is our doctor, and a most excellent one she is, too, I can assure you. She was just saying that you didn't look at all well, and wondering if you were going to have the measles."

"I had 'em long ago," answered the lad, "and I never felt better in my life. I was a bit sleepy."

"Which isn't surprising after all you have recently undergone," remarked the doctor, with a winning smile that served to establish friendly relations between them at once. "You see, we have already heard of your brave struggle against our unruly river, and that you may be prepared for them I will tell you at once that there are two more ladies at the station who are quite anxious to meet the hero of so many adventures."

"Oh!" gasped poor Phil, who had never before been called a hero.

"Yes, but you needn't look so alarmed. They aren't half so formidable as I am, for they haven't the privi-



ARRIVAL OF THE DOCTOR

lege of ordering people to do things that I obtained with my diploma."

"Are you going to order me to do things?" asked Phil, with recovered self-possession.

"Indeed I am; for as a doctor I dare issue orders even to a steamboat captain," laughed the young woman. "I am going to order you to take sleep in big doses. It is a famous remedy in this country, for our nights are already seventeen hours long, and steadily lengthening. But, joking aside, I want to congratulate you, Mr. Ryder, on your skilful care of this patient, whose life has been undoubtedly saved by your success in keeping him warm. Although he is still a very sick man, I believe the crisis is past, and that with the nursing he can have on shore he will pull through all right."

"I'm awfully glad to hear it," said Phil, "but I'm puzzled to know how we are to get him ashore. I shouldn't think it would do to carry him over the ice in the face of the wind that is blowing."

"No, indeed," replied the doctor.

"So we have made arrangements to carry him in this very boat," said the missionary, "and if you care to step outside for a moment you can see how we propose to accomplish it."

Phil had been wondering at the sound of many voices and busy labor that came from without, but as he gained the deck he comprehended the missionary's plan at a glance. Some fifty native men and boys, directed by a white man, were hard at work with axes, ice-chisels, poles, and other implements opening a channel the full width of the *Chimo* from where she lay to the shore. As fast as a cake was loosened it was shoved under the solid ice on the down-stream side, and already a passage was opened for one-third of the distance.

“That is a capital idea !” exclaimed Phil, “and one that I don’t believe I should have thought of. Even if I had I am afraid we couldn’t have carried it out by ourselves, nor do I believe we could have induced those natives to work for us as they seem willing to do for you.”

“Perhaps not,” replied the missionary ; “but I think they are fond of me, for when I explained to them how much I owed to my timely meeting with you last evening they seemed only too glad of a chance to return the favor.”

“I didn’t realize that you owed anything to us,” meditated Phil. “In fact, I thought we had been indebted to you for favors ever since our fortunate meeting. But it seems as though most every one was in debt to some one else for assistance in times of trouble.”

“Ah, my boy,” replied the missionary, “that is one of the fundamental principles of human life. From the moment we enter this world until we leave it we are dependent upon others for everything we possess, including life itself. Wherefore it becomes us to render unto our fellows such services as we may, promptly and cheerfully. But here comes Serge, and I am sure he is going to say that breakfast is ready.”

“Yes,” laughed Serge, “I am, and I should have said it long ago only Phil was so sound asleep that I couldn’t wake him without disturbing the captain. But now, if he is hungry—”

“If I am hungry !” cried Phil. “I honestly believe it was only my ravenous hunger that put me to sleep. Will you join us, sir ?”

“I was only waiting for an invitation,” replied the missionary, with a smile, “for I didn’t stop ashore long enough to get anything to eat. Nor do I believe the doctor has had her breakfast; so if Serge doesn’t mind having a lady at his table—”

"A lady?" stammered Serge, in dismay, and gazing wildly about him. "Is there one on board?"

"There certainly is," laughed the missionary, "and from what she has heard of your culinary skill she is most anxious to test it."

A minute later they were all gathered about the *Chimo's* mess-table, and the doctor was winning golden opinions by her judiciously bestowed compliments. Even gruff Mr. Sims was induced to smile by her praise of his polished engine, which she declared outshone any yet seen on the Yukon; while Isaac was told that the mission saw-mill was so frightfully out of order that the man of all men most needed there at that moment was a millwright.

The pleasant meal was hardly finished when a great shout from outside announced the completion of the canal. Then, with Phil at the wheel, while the missionary and the doctor occupied the pilot-house with him, and with flags at half-mast for the dead man in her cabin, the stanch little *Chimo* steamed slowly up the narrow channel to the berth she was to occupy for the next eight months. As she reached it the mission flag was dipped in salute, and then hoisted to half-mast in sympathy with her sorrow.

So the eventful voyage of four hundred miles from St. Michaels was ended; and, thanks to the lads whom Gerald Hamer had rescued from the cruel waters of Bering Sea, he and his property were now moored in a safe haven. And it was none too soon, for that very night the cold was so intense that the Yukon was frozen from bank to bank.

But Phil did not care, nor did Serge. They had reached the goal towards which they had set their faces with such sturdy determination, and for them neither cold nor storm had any present terrors.

CHAPTER VIII

LIFE AT AN ARCTIC MISSION

THE first thing to be undertaken after the *Chimo* was safely moored in her snug berth was the removal of Gerald Hamer to the little log hospital that was the pride of the doctor's heart. This was accomplished without any danger from exposure by means of a canvas-covered litter especially constructed for the occasion. To be undressed for the first time in many days, given a warm bath, and placed in a bed that was actually spread with sheets was to be so "lapped in luxury" that, as the sick man whispered to Phil, any one who wouldn't get well under such conditions deserved to die.

The second duty was the burial of poor Martin, for whom a grave was already prepared in the quaint little cemetery of the settlement. The rude coffin was borne by his late shipmates, and the entire community of Anvik, natives as well as whites, followed the body to its place of final rest. Never had Phil been so impressed with the solemn beauty of the Episcopal service as when he listened to its grand utterances amid the surroundings of that wild Northern land. The low-hanging sun, the moan of the wintry wind through the sombre forest, the attentive groups of dark-skinned natives, the mighty river rolling its tawny flood at their feet, and the encircling solitudes, vast, silent, and mysterious, centring at that simple grave, combined to form a picture that none of its spectators will ever forget.

When all was over the living left the dead with the dead, and returned to their homes. Even Phil and Serge declined, on the plea of utter weariness, the proffered hospitality of the mission for that night, and went back to their own quarters aboard the *Chimo*, where for the next twenty-four hours they slept almost without intermission.

Then they were ready for anything, and when they again presented themselves at the mission, clad in new suits taken from the steamer's ample trade stock, the ladies found it difficult to realize that these handsome, wide-awake young fellows were the same who, heavy-eyed, unkempt, and ready to drop with exhaustion, had brought the *Chimo* to port two days before.

Nor did it seem to the boys that they could be in the same place, for while they slept the river had frozen completely over, a fall of snow had infolded all nature in its spotless mantle, and now the whole world lay sparkling in unclouded sunlight. If they were amazed at the change in the aspect of the mission they were also delighted with the missionary's house, which they now entered for the first time. Not since leaving far-away New London had either of them seen anything to compare with the prettiness and comfort displayed in this wilderness house on the verge of arctic Alaska.

There were books, magazines, and pictures, rugs and potted ferns, a small organ, luxurious divans and easy-chairs, a museum of native curios, and many other noticeable objects of use or ornament. In an immense fireplace a cheery blaze roared and crackled, and before it a fine big cat purred forth his content. In the eyes of the boys there was nothing lacking to the perfection of this interior. And yet it was all very simple and inexpensive. Most of the furniture was home-made, the divans were cushioned with feathers from native wild-

fowl, and the rugs were trophies from neighboring forest or waters.

The missionary's family consisted of his wife, the doctor, a young lady teacher, and a white man who had charge of the saw-mill. Besides these there were a few bright native boys and girls who were under special instruction.

While the lads chatted with the ladies and marvelled at their surroundings one of the native boys was seen approaching the house, whereupon its mistress, saying, "Ah! there comes the mail," went to the door. "Nothing but the paper," she announced on her return; "but we shall at least learn the latest news."

"I had no idea that you had a mail service in the winter," remarked Phil, innocently, "nor that there was a paper published in this part of the world."

"Oh, dear, no! It isn't published here," laughed the missionary's wife. "It is a New York paper, and only a weekly at that; still it is better than none, and being of this week's date its news is quite recent. See?"

So saying she held out the paper for Phil's inspection, and to his amazement he saw that it was indeed a New York paper bearing the date of October 20th. Not until Serge, to whom this harmless deception was an old story, broke out with the laughter he could no longer restrain did it flash into Phil's mind that the paper was a year old, and then he could have thumped himself for his stupidity.

"You see," explained the missionary's wife, "we only receive mail once or twice a year, and then we get such a quantity of papers that we cannot possibly read them all at once. So we lay them aside, and have them delivered one at a time on their regular dates, by which means we receive two or three newspapers every week during the year."

"What a capital idea!" exclaimed Phil.

“Isn’t it? And it is such good training for the boys, who are allowed to act as postmen. Then, too, we use the papers in school in place of reading-books, and so have fresh topics with which to interest the scholars every week. On this account our reading-class is so popular that it has nearly outgrown the capacity of our school-room; but, thanks to Captain Hamer, we are to have a new one in the spring.”

“Indeed! Is he going to build you one?”

“He is already having it built, and it is to serve as your winter-quarters so long as you remain with us, after which it is to be presented to the mission.”

This was so interesting a bit of news that the boys must visit the hospital at once and learn what plans the leader of their expedition had made. They found him so far recovered as already to take an interest in his surroundings, and able to talk freely with them. He told them that with a view to the future needs of the school the new building was to be forty feet long by twenty wide, though for the sake of present warmth and comfort it was to be divided into several small sleeping-rooms, a large living-room for the use of the *Chimo’s* crew, and a store-room for such goods as it was deemed best to remove from the steamer for safer keeping.

“In it,” explained the captain, “we will make ourselves as comfortable as possible for the winter, and in the spring we will push on for the diggings. With the four hundred miles’ start we have got, thanks to you boys, we ought to reach them in time to do a rattling business before the company’s boats get there.”

“But how about going out by way of Chilkat for your next year’s supply of goods?” queried Phil.

“Oh, that plan must be given up, of course, and I must make up my mind to sacrifice a year’s business for the fun I’ve had with the measles. The trip from

here in the dead of winter would be a tough one for the strongest of men, for it must be all of two thousand miles. It will easily take me the rest of the winter to regain strength enough to go on with the boat in the spring, so there's no use thinking of that trip now. I'll manage to send you boys out somehow next summer, which is the nearest I can come to keeping my contract with you. In the meantime, while I am sorry for your disappointment, I am very glad of your company and services."

"You don't think, then, that it would be possible for us to go out this winter by way of Forty Mile and the coast and make our way to the Sound, or even to San Francisco, and order your goods for you?" suggested Phil, in whose mind this wild scheme had suddenly assumed shape.

"You two inexperienced boys!" exclaimed the captain, amazed at the audacity of the proposition. "Certainly not. Why, I don't believe either of you knows how to use snow-shoes, or to drive a team of dogs, or has the least idea of what fifty below zero means."

"I think I know," said Serge.

"Which?"

"All of those things," replied the young Russo-American.

"You know more than I do, then, or ever expect to, for I have never driven a dog-team. As for Phil here, I am certain that he knows nothing about any one of the three."

"I believe I could learn," said the boy from New London, "and I know I'd be glad of the chance."

"Well, you can study those things right here, and while you are learning what fifty below zero means you'll be glad enough to have a well-warmed house near by in which to study the results of your lesson. You'll find plenty to occupy your time in this immedi-

ate vicinity for the next few months. So don't think any more of the crazy scheme you have just proposed, for I can't possibly give my consent to it. If I should thus lose sight of you I should spend the rest of my days in mortal terror of meeting Mr. John Ryder and having him demand to know what I had done with his boy. Now I shall have to ask you to leave me for a while, as I am too tired to talk any more."

As soon as the boys were outside Phil asked, "How do you drive dogs, Serge? Do you have lines to each one, or only to the leader?"

"You don't drive them with lines at all," laughed the other. "Nor do you go near them. You sometimes run beside the sledge, but generally behind it, so as to push on the handle-bar over obstructions, or to hang on and hold back in going down steep places. From there you talk to the dogs, and encourage them with a whip of walrus-hide or seal-skin that has a handle about sixteen inches long and a lash of about eighteen feet. To produce the slightest effect on your team you must be able to crack that lash with a report like a pistol-shot in either ear of any dog, or to fleck any one of them on any designated part of the body. You must also learn the language that your dogs are accustomed to, for they will pay no attention to any other."

"And are snow-shoes a necessity?"

"Certainly they are, for without them you would often sink out of sight in drifts, while even in soft snow of moderate depth they are indispensable."

"Well," sighed Phil, "it seems as though one had to learn a great deal before he can travel far in this country; but I suppose if others have, I can. So let's go and borrow a pair of snow-shoes and have a lesson at once. I suppose I might as well begin the Eskimo whip-practice and dog-language, too; for with such a

long journey ahead of us we mustn't waste any more time than is absolutely necessary on preliminaries."

"What long journey?" asked Serge.

"Our journey up the river to Forty Mile, and so on to Chilkat, of course. You didn't imagine we were going to loaf here all winter, did you?"

"But the captain won't give his consent."

"Oh, we'll manage that. Besides, we've got to get to Sitka some time, you know, or our parents will be getting anxious about us."

CHAPTER IX

PHIL'S ESKIMO MILITIA

PHIL and Serge dropped very easily into the life of the mission, and quickly became interested in its work. The missionary had always found more or less trouble with the older Indian boys, who were almost ready to take their place in the tribe as hunters, and so felt themselves rather above going to school with the children. When Phil learned of this difficulty he conceived a plan for overcoming it, which, with the missionary's consent, he at once proceeded to put into execution. It was nothing more nor less than to form the unruly boys into a military company. He had been an officer in his own school company at New London, and even Serge had become fairly well drilled during the year he had spent there.

Phil and Serge had already formed the acquaintance of an intelligent young Indian named Chitsah, son of Kurilla, who had once been in the employ of an American exploring party, from whom he had gained a fair knowledge of English.

Through Chitsah, therefore, Phil issued an invitation to all the Indian lads between the ages of twelve and eighteen to meet him and Serge in the large school-room, which was cleared of its furniture for the purpose, that very evening, as he wanted to teach them a new game. About one dozen boys accepted this invitation, and a disreputable, slouchy appearing lot they were, all clad in cast-off or well-worn garments of civ-

ilization, and looking as though half ashamed of being there. As Phil afterwards said, he expected each moment to see them become panic-stricken and make a break for the door.

By the aid of Serge and Chitsah, who acted as interpreters, Phil explained that the new game was called "soldiers." He said that all who wanted to join his company and come to that place three nights of the week for drill might do so, provided each would first make for himself a wooden gun like the one he had prepared that day, and which he now showed them. After a while they would give an exhibition drill to which all their friends should be invited, but in the meantime everything that took place at their meetings was to be kept secret from outsiders. Then the young drill-master put Serge through the manual of arms and a few marching movements to illustrate his meaning.

The boys quickly comprehended the idea, and were charmed with it. Some of them began instinctively to stand straight and throw back their shoulders in imitation of Serge. When Phil ranged them in a line toeing a chalk-mark drawn across the floor, and then, stepping back a few paces, called out, "Attention!" every one of them assumed an attitude bearing some resemblance to that of a soldier, and stood motionless. Then Phil pinned a band of scarlet cloth about the left sleeve of the largest boy, who was known as Big Sidorka, and told him he might wear it for one week, after which it would be given to whichever one of the company the others should decide to be the best drilled.

The next evening twenty boys appeared, and every one brought with him a wooden gun, all neatly and some beautifully made. At this meeting they were given their permanent positions in the ranks, taught

to count "fours" at the word of command, to hold themselves erect, to "carry" and to "shoulder" arms. They were also given to understand that the company was now full, and, until after the exhibition drill, no more members would be admitted. This at once gave membership a value that made it seem very desirable.

On this occasion, after the drill was over, Serge produced a number of illustrated books and papers containing pictures of soldiers, the meaning of which he explained with such success as to fully arouse the interest of his dusky audience. As a result of this experiment the young Russo-American, who had worked so bravely for his own education, found himself within a week teaching an enthusiastic reading-class, in which every member of Phil's military company was a willing scholar.

The missionary was jubilant over these successes, and declared that with a dozen such helpers as Phil and Serge he could have every Indian on the Yukon in school within one year.

In the meantime our lads were not neglectful of their own affairs. With every able-bodied Indian procurable enlisted in the work, the new building was completed by the end of the first week, and for some days the *Chimo's* crew found ample occupation in furnishing and storing it. Then, too, under instructions from Serge, Chitsah, or Kurilla, Phil spent every spare moment of daylight in learning the art of snow-shoeing, mastering the terrible Eskimo whip, and acquiring a vocabulary of dog-language.

He got many a tumble on his snow-shoes, and took ludicrous "headers" into many a deep drift, where he would flounder helplessly until rescued by some of the delighted spectators of his mishaps. The long whip, too, tried its best to strangle him by winding in snaky coils about his neck, or to tangle itself in bewildering

knots around his legs. As for his vocabulary, it was enough to provoke laughter in the most sedate of sledge dogs, and created uproarious mirth among the human occupants of the Indian village. In spite of all difficulties, Phil persevered with unabated energy, until gradually his feet and the snow-shoes began to work together. He actually succeeded in cracking the snake-like whip so that the sound could be heard, and Kurilla's fine team of bushy-tailed dogs began to prick up their sharp ears understandingly when he addressed them. Many a spin did he have on the river behind this lively team, with Kurilla running beside the sledge and cracking his mighty whip until its reports rattled like a fire of musketry. When at length Phil was allowed to run with the sledge instead of occupying it as a passenger, and the entire control of the team was intrusted to him, he felt prouder, as Jalap Coombs used to say, than was becoming to a mere mortal man.

But his pride was quickly humbled, for ere they had gone a mile the dogs discovered that they had no reason to fear his whip, and that his unintelligible commands might be treated with contemptuous indifference. Suddenly Musky, the leader, who had a grudge of long standing against Amook, one of the big steer-dogs, turned like a flash and darted furiously at his enemy. In an instant the whole team was rolling in a confused mass of yelping, snarling, snapping, and biting fur, with traces tangled in a thousand knots, sledge going to smash, and pandemonium reigning generally.

Phil stood by in helpless consternation, and not until Kurilla, running up in breathless haste, flung himself bodily into the mêlée, did he have the faintest hope that any dog would emerge alive from that savage conflict.

Another time, as he thought he was meeting with complete success in driving this same team, and was thor-

oughly enjoying a ride in the sledge, the dogs suddenly stopped short and refused to go on. They sat on their haunches, with wagging tails, and looked up at Phil with pleased expressions, as though rejoicing over the discovery that they needn't work unless they chose. And there they sat, in spite of all their driver's efforts to move them, until he was in despair, when with equal suddenness they sprang up and dashed away home with the empty sledge, leaving him to follow on foot as best he might.

His first real journey by dog-sledge was to the Eskimo village of Makagamoot, fifteen miles down the river, and was taken in company with the missionary, who was accustomed to visit this place once a month. They went in two sledges, with Chitsah as runner, and Phil took with him a small lot of goods. For these Gerald Hamer wished him to procure several suits of fur clothing, in making which the Eskimos greatly excel their Indian neighbors.

While the entire coast of Alaska north of the great peninsula is inhabited by Eskimos, they never penetrate far into the interior, and only for short distances along the principal rivers. Nor do the Indians of the interior ever occupy the coast territory. Thus in the present case Makagamoot was the last wholly Eskimo settlement, and Anvik the first in which Indians predominated, on the Yukon.

Makagamoot was a much more thrifty village than its next neighbor, though at first sight its eight or ten large houses looked only like so many great inverted bowls or hillocks of snow. These winter residences are in a great part below the surface of the ground, where they are neatly lined with wood or whalebone, and are extremely comfortable after their fashion. Thus only their snow-covered roofs appear above the surface, and in the centre of each is a square smoke-hole, that ad-

mits such daylight and outer air as find their way to the interior. Access to these dwellings is gained by means of tunnel-like approaches, through most of which a man must crawl on hands and knees.

Back of the dwellings rose twenty or thirty of what Phil had called log dove-cots, about six feet square and high, mounted on ten-foot posts. He now knew them to be provision caches or store-houses for the smoked or dried fish and meat that furnished the entire winter's supply of food for the village. They are thus constructed to insure their contents against the horde of wolfish-looking dogs that ever gaze at them with hungry longings. For the same reason all sledges and skin-covered boats must be stored on scaffolds erected for the purpose.

Phil and the missionary received an uproarious welcome, emphasized by a great firing of guns, at this quaint Eskimo village, and were conducted to the kashga, or principal building, which is at once town-hall, hotel, bath-house, and general assembly-room for the settlement, as well as the winter residence of all unmarried men.

So great was the heat in this place, so stifling its atmosphere, and so horrible its odors, that poor Phil gasped for breath on entering it. In vain did he attempt to partake of some of the delicacies pressed upon their guests by the hospitable natives. Raw seal's liver, strips of reindeer fat, dried fish, salmon roe that had been kept for many weeks in a hole in the ground, and caribou bones split so that the marrow might be sucked from them, succeeded each other in rapid succession. Phil was hungry, but not hungry enough for any of these.

Nor could he force himself to remain in that terrible atmosphere long enough to witness the wedding of an Eskimo girl with a white man, a Russian ex-



INDIAN GIRLS, ALASKA

employé of the old fur company, which was the first duty the missionary was called upon to perform. The mortified lad was sorry to thus disappoint his kind-hearted and well-meaning entertainers ; but there was no help for it. So with swimming head and uneasy stomach he made a break for the place of exit.

CHAPTER X

A SAD ROMANCE OF THE WILDERNESS

FROM long familiarity with such interiors as that of the kashga, and by a powerful exercise of will, the missionary was able to remain long after poor Phil had taken his departure, and also to partake of several of the Eskimo dainties already mentioned. It was largely by thus conforming in a measure to the ways of the natives when with them that he had gained their confidence and acquired the popularity that paved the way for future usefulness. Still, it was with a great sigh of relief and an eager inhaling of fresh air that he finally emerged from that fetid atmosphere.

Phil in the meantime had been amusing himself by climbing the dome-like roofs of the houses, and obtaining such glimpses as he might of their interiors through the smoke-holes. He never gazed long though, for the vile odors issuing from those apertures always drove him away after a single glance below.

“How can human beings endure such vile, disgusting smells?” he exclaimed, as the missionary rejoined him.

“They are not vile and disgusting to them,” laughed the other. “If noticed at all, they are extremely agreeable. You must remember that the atmosphere which you find so unendurable is that to which the Eskimo has always been accustomed. As soon as he is born his entire body is liberally smeared with rancid

oil, and to the day of his death this coating of grease, frequently renewed, affords his best protection against cold and wet.

“His staples of food are fish and meat often in a state of partial decay, and always odorous. Thus the smells that to your unaccustomed nostrils are so offensive, are to him associated with all that makes life pleasant or even possible. At the same time he exhibits the greatest aversion to those perfumes that you consider most pleasing. A whiff of cologne will make him ill, and flowers that to us are sweet-scented are to him unendurable. Thus you see the sense of smell, like all other senses, can be educated to adapt itself to any conditions, and, happily for the Eskimo, he finds nothing objectionable in the nauseous odors surrounding him.”

“That is so,” reflected Phil, “for now I remember that the Aleuts of the Pribyloff Islands could not understand what I meant when I complained of the awful stench rising from the decomposing bodies of thousands of seals lying at their very doors.”

With the aid of the missionary and Chitsah, Phil traded off the small stock of goods he had brought with him for half a dozen parkas, or outer garments, made from reindeer-skin with the hair still attached, as many pairs of winter boots, and a number of other articles made from seal-skin. Each of the parkas had a hood at the back, which could be drawn up over the head. The edge of this hood was trimmed with wolf-skin taken from the back, where the hair is longest. When the hood is in use these long hairs surround the wearer's face with a bristling fringe that affords a surprising amount of protection from driving snow and icy winds.

The tarbossa, or Eskimo boots, were made of the skin of reindeer legs on which the hair is short and

stiff, and were provided with soles of seal-skin, turned up over toes and heels, where they are gathered in little puckers that the native women chew or shape with their teeth. The upper end of one of these boots is tied about the wearer's knee, while a second set of thongs at the ankle holds it in place at that point.

Besides these things, Phil purchased a number of Eskimo wolf-traps, the cruel ingenuity and extreme simplicity of which exceeded anything of the kind he had ever seen. They were merely bits of stiff whalebone about one foot long, with sharpened points, folded into the smallest possible compass, and confined in that position by a lashing of sinew. For use this harmless-looking affair is thrust into a piece of meat, which is frozen and thrown down on the snow. Mr. Wolf swallows meat, trap and all, with such relish that he at once searches for another bit just like it. In the meantime the trap has begun its deadly work in his stomach. Its sinew lashing softens, weakens, and finally breaks under the steady strain of the compressed whalebone. Thus released the bone springs into its original shape, thrusts its sharp points into the wolf's vitals, and often kills him instantly. If not at once, death ensues in a very short time, and when the thrifty Eskimo cuts up his wolf he generally recovers his trap and prepares it to be set again.

The sledge-party from Anvik had started from there before daylight of that morning with a view to returning the same night. So as soon as the missionary had visited every house in Makagamoot and Phil had concluded his trading, the dogs, which Chitsah had been obliged to guard all this time from an overwhelming onslaught by their Eskimo cousins, were headed homeward, and the return journey was begun. Chitsah drove the leading sledge, which was laden

with the several hundred pounds of dried fish that the missionary had received as a wedding-fee, the missionary drove the other, which bore Phil's purchases, and the Yankee lad trudged beside him.

"Are you often called on to marry two people of different races?" asked the latter, who was thinking over the events of their recent visit.

"No, not often; though it is not uncommon for white men, who have become permanent settlers in the country, to marry native women, and I once married a Chinese man to an Eskimo girl. My strangest experience in that line, though, was gained some years ago, when I first came to this country. Wishing to familiarize myself with the entire valley, I took a trip on the company's steamer to the head of navigation. We stopped to trade at every Indian camp, and at one of these, near Fort Yukon, a couple came on board to get married. The man was a tall, good-looking fellow, but a full-blooded Cree Indian, from the distant interior. His companion was also in Indian costume, but the moment I looked at her face I saw, to my amazement, that she was a white girl. She was quite young, but had the saddest face I think I ever saw. I remonstrated with her against the step she proposed to take, but in a perfectly calm voice, and speaking most excellent English, though with a Scotch accent, she assured me that she was well aware of what she was about to do, and that it was her firm resolve to marry the Indian who stood beside her. Both he and she gave the name of McLeod, and under that name I married them.

"After the ceremony was over she told me her story. It seems that, in spite of her fair skin, she was a half-breed daughter of the Scotch factor of a Hudson Bay trading-post and his Indian wife. When she was thirteen years old her father sent her to Scotland to

be educated. She made the long trip by canoe and sledge from the distant post where she was born to York Factory, on Hudson Bay, in safety, and there took passage in the company's annual ship for London. From there she was sent to Edinburgh, where for five years she lived with relatives and attended school. Then she received a note of recall from her father, and was obliged to retrace the wearisome journey over thousands of miles of sea and wilderness to her home in the far Northwest. It was terrible for her to leave the dear friends and pleasant associations of so many years, and hardest of all to separate from the young Scotchman who had won her heart and her promise to marry him as soon as he should come to claim her in her own home. While she returned to Hudson Bay in a company's ship, he was forced to travel by way of New York and through the States.

“When the girl reached her home she immediately told her parents of her engagement, and that her lover was even then on his way to marry her. To her dismay her father flew into a violent rage, informed her that he had already selected a husband for her in the person of one of the company's employés stationed at Fort Liard, and declared that she must marry him at once. In vain did the girl plead with him and endeavor to change his cruel determination, and in vain did the mother take her part. The tyrannical father only grew the more obstinate, and when, after months of weary wanderings, the Scotch lover appeared at the fort, he was driven from it with bitter words. He was not allowed to see, or even communicate with, the girl, but was ordered to leave the country at once.

“There was nothing to do but obey. The factor was also the only magistrate of a vast region, and ruled it with a rod of iron. None could dwell within his jurisdiction without his knowledge, none obtain employ-

ment without his consent. The forts held all the necessaries of life, and none could be purchased elsewhere. A band of Indians was ordered to convey the unfortunate youth several hundreds of miles away and there leave him. This they did, but what afterwards became of him I do not know.

“By some means the girl learned of her lover’s visit to the fort, of his harsh reception, and of his cruel banishment. The knowledge broke her heart. She became dejected and miserable, and spent her days in weeping. At this her father became so furious that he sent for the man to whom he had promised her to come and marry her at once. He furthermore upbraided his daughter in the presence of all the employés of the fort, and said such cruel things about the man she loved that, declaring she could bear it no longer, she ran out, mounted her pony, and fled to her mother’s tribe. There she promised to marry a young Indian who had long admired her, and at once set out with his family for the Yukon, where they hoped to find a priest. As it happened, I was the first whom they encountered, and the result I have already told.”

“What became of them after that?” asked Phil, who was deeply interested in this sad romance of the wilderness.

“I do not know. They dared not return to the territory governed by her father, and the last I heard of them they were living by themselves somewhere on the upper Yukon, where the man was making a precarious livelihood by trapping. I tried to induce them to come and make their home at the mission, but poor Ellen McLeod answered that she should never again dwell among people of her father’s race.”

“Poor girl,” sighed Phil, who had a very tender heart for the troubles of others. “I wonder if we should have any chance of meeting them if we took

our trip up the river? By-the-way, sir, don't you think Serge and I might be trusted to make that trip this winter?"

"I should not care to advise you to do it," replied the missionary, "knowing its dangers as I do. And certainly you could not go without Captain Hamer's consent, for you would require a more expensive outfit than any one save he could furnish."

"I suppose so," admitted Phil, ruefully, "but I can't help thinking something will turn up to make it seem best to let us go."

They were by this time nearing Anvik, and though the sun had long since set, the river was flooded with moonlight. All at once a dark figure darted out from the shore and came running towards them. As it drew near, Kurilla's well-known voice shouted, breathlessly: "Cap'n Phil's fadder gone up river! Yaas, he fadder!"

"My father!" cried Phil. "It can't be. You must be crazy, for my father is thousands of miles from here."

"True, all same. You fadder, yaas!"



“CAP’N PHIL’S FADDER GONE UP RIVER! YAAS, HE FADDER!”

CHAPTER XI

THE BOYS CARRY THEIR POINT

NEVER in his life had Phil Ryder been more perplexed than he was at the astonishing statement just made by Kurilla. It was incredible that his father should be in that country. Why should he be? There had been barely time for him to receive the letter sent out by Nikrik, and he could not possibly have reached the Yukon Valley since then.

"How do you know it is my father?" he demanded of the native. "Has he been here? Did you see him? Why didn't he wait until I came back?"

"Him no come. Him go up river. Me no see him. You fadder, yaas."

"What can the man mean?" asked Phil, in despair of obtaining any intelligible explanation and turning to the missionary for aid.

From that time until they reached the station, which they found in a state of excitement over the news, the missionary questioned Kurilla in his own tongue, and by the time they were inside the house he had gleaned all the information the Indian possessed.

"He says," began the missionary, turning to his eager audience, "that he obtained his news from a Nulato Indian, who left St. Michaels only three days ago, and came by way of the Divide and the Anvik River. He is a friend of Kurilla, and spent a couple of hours with him this morning, after which he continued his journey. According to him, as understood by Kurilla,

a schooner containing Phil's father and another white man reached the Redoubt soon after the *Chimo* left. The other white man was sick, so that none of the natives saw him; but Phil's father spent his whole time making inquiries of every one about the boys, and where they had gone, what sort of a man they had gone with, and what chance there was of overtaking them."

"I am afraid he did not receive a very flattering description of the man they had gone with," remarked Gerald Hamer, who was by this time out of the hospital and able to join the pleasant family circle.

"About that same time," continued the missionary, "the revenue-cutter *Bear* came down from the northward, bringing the crew of a wrecked whaler, so that for a while there were many white men and much confusion at St. Michaels. Then both the *Bear* and the schooner sailed away, taking most of the white men with them, but Phil's father stayed behind. By-and-by news came from Nulato that the *Chimo* had passed that point without stopping, on her way up the river."

"Which is news indeed," muttered Gerald Hamer, "seeing that Nulato is a good one hundred and fifty miles beyond here."

"Isn't it?" laughed the missionary. "And, to cap the climax, the same runner that brought that information announced that you would undoubtedly be frozen in before you had gone much farther, whereupon Phil's father began making preparations to follow and overtake you by dog-sledges. He started the day before our informant left the Redoubt, and was accompanied by two other white men, though whether one of them was he who also came on the schooner, Kurilla did not find out. So there you have the whole story as straight as it can be obtained; but, considering the channels through which it has come, there is

such an opportunity for errors that I should not be at all surprised if a number had crept into it."

"Nor I," admitted Phil, "though I can't doubt that my father has arrived in this part of the country, impossible as it may seem, for surely no one else could have any object in announcing himself as my father, or going to such trouble in hunting me up. Nor can I doubt that, having conceived some absurd notion that I am likely to get into trouble, the dear old pop has set forth on a wild-goose chase after me. I fancy I can see him at this moment politely trying to breathe, or to swallow raw seal, in some native hut, or careering over the river behind a team of runaway dogs, or wrestling with the intricacies of an Eskimo whip, or having some of the other delightful experiences that he is certain to encounter. There is one thing that won't bother him, though, and that is snow-shoeing, for he learned that long ago in Canada."

"How fond he must be of you!" said the missionary's wife.

"Yes, indeed, he is!" cried Phil. "And I of him, for we are everything in the world to each other."

"And how anxious he must be!" murmured the teacher.

"I suppose so; though I don't see why he should be, for he taught me to take care of myself long ago. I am beginning to get pretty anxious about him, though, and it seems to me that it is clearly my duty to organize a relief expedition at once and go in search of him. What do you say to that, Serge?"

"I say I should feel exactly as you do if he were my mother," answered the lad from Sitka, who was immediately afterwards covered with confusion by the outburst of merriment that greeted his remark.

"I mean—" he stammered.

"Of course," interrupted Phil, teasingly, "we un-

derstand. You mean that if my father were your mother, in which case you and I would probably be brother and sister, you would feel in duty bound to go in search of him or her, as the case might be."

"Oh, you get out!" laughed Serge.

"The very thing I am proposing to do. And, really, Captain Hamer, now that my father has appeared on the scene, and gone up the river, I don't see how you can any longer have an excuse for refusing to let Serge and me follow after him. If we don't overtake him this side of Forty Mile, we shall certainly find him there. Then we can all go out together by way of Chilkat, and I know that out of gratitude for your kindness to me, if for no other reason, my father will gladly undertake to place your order for goods in San Francisco."

"Your argument is certainly a strong one," admitted Gerald Hamer, hesitatingly, "and it really begins to look as though you had gained your point after all."

"And we ought to start as quickly as we can," urged Phil, eagerly, "in order to relieve my father's anxiety as soon as possible, and also to prevent him from getting lost, which, I am sure, any one is likely to do on the Yukon. When it comes to procuring dogs for the trip, I would advise you to buy Kurilla's team, if possible, for I give you my word they are far and away the very best lot of haulers I have ever driven. As for their feed, I was invited to a certain wedding to-day, though I regret that I was forced to decline the invitation, that resulted in a sledge-load of prime dog-fish—no, I don't mean that either, for they were salmon—which, I believe, can be bought cheap."

Thus rattling on and unhesitatingly offering advice on all subjects connected with dog-sledging and snow-shoeing, even going so far as to express the opinion

that for their work Norwegian skis would be far better than the ordinary snow-shoe of the country, Phil succeeded within a few minutes in establishing the fact that his long-cherished expedition was really to be undertaken.

As he remarked in a low but exultant tone to Serge after they had gone to bed that night: "Hurrah for snow-shoes and sledges, old man! We have got them at last, as I told you we would from the very beginning."

And Serge, who was almost asleep, roused himself sufficiently to reply: "What did you say? Oh yes, I know. Hurrah! Good-night."

Whereupon the Yankee lad disgustedly hurled a pillow at him with such force as to effectually banish sleep and provoke retaliation that resulted in Phil's bed coming down with a crash. Upon this its occupant remarked that he always did despise civilized beds anyhow, and that hemlock boughs in front of a rousing camp-fire were good enough for him.

In the meantime some of the preliminaries of the tremendous journey, to which the boys looked forward with such delight and their elders with so many misgivings, had been arranged that very evening. The best obtainable map of the Yukon was studied, and marked with such private information as was possessed by the missionary.

"If you could only overtake them before reaching the Tanana River," he said, reflectively, "you might cut off the great arctic bend of the Yukon, and save several hundred miles by going up the former river, crossing a divide to a branch of Forty Mile Creek, and following it down to the camp at its mouth. I suppose, though, they will have passed the Tanana long before you get there, and so you will be obliged to follow the great bend for fear of missing them."

"I suppose so," assented Phil, "but I don't care. The longer the trip the more fun we'll have."

"You will find it long enough before you get through," remarked Gerald Hamer, significantly.

"I hope so," returned the irrepressible lad. "I like to have enough of a good thing."

An hour or more was devoted to making out a list of the articles necessary for the trip. While from then until the very time of departure Phil kept thinking of and adding new items to this list, Serge was kept equally busy in trying to reduce its length.

Before Kurilla was dismissed that evening both he and his son Chitsah were engaged to accompany the boys at least as far as Forty Mile, a distance of one thousand miles, though beyond that point they would not promise to go.

From Kurilla also Gerald Hamer agreed to purchase, at his own price, his fine team of dogs, of which bushy-tailed Musky was leader, big Amook and Mint were steer-dogs, and Luvtuk and Shag completed the nimble-footed quintet. This was hereafter to be known as Phil's team, for, having already had some experience in driving them, it was believed that he could manage them better than dogs unaccustomed to his astonishing pronunciation of the native words of command. Kurilla was to bring them to him the very next morning to be fed, for in dog-sledging it is a rule that every driver shall feed his own team, in order to win their regard and persuade them that he is not an unmitigated evil.

The season was now late November, and though the morrow was Thanksgiving day, or believed to be such in absence of any proclamation to that effect, it was to be devoted to preparations, and the start was to be made at sunrise of the following morning. Therefore Phil's last words of the night were :

“I am dead tired, old man, but I want you to wake me early all the same, for I shall have only one day in which to feed my dogs and teach them to know me.”

CHAPTER XII

PHIL FEEDS HIS DOGS

It did not seem to Phil that he had any more than closed his eyes before he was awakened by such a babel of yelps and barkings as notified him that further sleep was out of the question, and also that his dogs were waiting to be fed. Hearty imprecations showered on the heads of the vociferous team from the direction of Mr. Sims's room, and threats to treat them to a dose of duck-shot, so hastened Phil's movements that in a few seconds he had slipped on his seal-skin boots and fur parka, and was outside in the stinging cold. There in the moonlight stood Kurilla, with a broad grin on his good-humored face, holding in leash Phil's team. Every member of it, but big Amook loudest of all, was vigorously demanding his three meals of the day before and the one already due on the present morning, or four in all.

On the Yukon it is customary to feed sledge-dogs once in every twenty-four hours, and that at night, after the day's work is ended. In order that Musky and Luvtuk and the others might be so unusually hungry as to fully appreciate the first meal from the hands of their new master, Kurilla had withheld their meal of the previous evening, so that now they were fairly ravenous. Near at hand stood Chitsah, restraining with the utmost difficulty another team of dogs that were destined to be driven by Serge. As they had been regularly fed the evening before, they could not have been so hungry as Phil's team, though

from their howlings one would think they had not tasted food for a week.

Appreciating the seriousness of the situation, and shouting to Serge to come out and attend to the wants of his own team, Phil ran to the storehouse, from which he took two dried salmon. They were so large that he proposed to cut each into several pieces of such size as seemed to him fitted to a dog's throat. As he approached his team he called to Serge to fetch him a knife; but almost as he uttered the words he was given to understand that it was not needed.

With a savage spring Amook reached his side, seized one of the big fish in his powerful jaws, and with a couple of convulsive gulplings swallowed it whole. Having accomplished this feat he wagged his tail cheerfully, and looked up into his young master's face, as much as to say, "That sample was so good that I think I'll take some fish, if you please."

"Well, if you aren't an ostrich!" Phil started to say; but even as he opened his mouth to speak he was overthrown and instantly buried beneath an avalanche of dogs. Incited by Amook's brilliant success, Musky, Mint, Shag, and Luvtuk followed his example, while the dogs held by Chitsah broke loose at the same moment, and all projected themselves with the energy of living catapults towards the single fish that Phil still held.

Both Kurilla and Chitsah instantly flung themselves on top of the confused mass of howling animals, and for the space of a minute the scene enacted in full view of the aroused inmates of the station was equal to any first-class football scrimmage. Women screamed, while men shouted and ran towards the place of battle.

In another minute the fierce animals had been torn apart, flung this way and that, and were sneaking off in so many different directions with lowered tails. The

two Indians were breathlessly but calmly readjusting their disordered garments, the salmon had disappeared, and Phil, sitting on the hard-packed snow, was tenderly feeling of different parts of his body.

"Are you much hurt, old man?" cried Serge, anxiously, as he reached his friend's side.

"Serge," replied Phil, solemnly, "did you ever happen to see a good little book called the Franklin Primer?"

"I don't think I ever did. Why?"

"Because it contains a picture that you would do well to study. The picture is that of a small boy, with a very anxious expression, hanging by his hands from the outer end of a branch that projects over a tropical river. Immediately beneath him swim a dozen open-mouthed crocodiles regarding him with evident expectancy. Beneath the picture is a legend to the effect that Johnny is about to feed his pets. Now let's turn in again and finish out our nap."

But there was too much to be done that day to admit of further sleeping, and both lads quickly found themselves full of business. To begin with, stores for the expedition were to be selected and carefully packed. Of these the largest single item was fish, to be used as dog food, and with this one sledge was wholly laden. Then came flour, tea, sugar, salt, bacon, hard bread, evaporated fruit, a package of fine pemmican—which is made of dried and pounded moose meat mixed with berries and boiling fat in a rawhide bag, where it becomes perfectly solid—oatmeal, a can of baking-powder, molasses, a case of canned goods for special occasions, a quantity of reindeer-back fat, to be used in place of butter or lard, and a few pounds of tobacco for trading with Indians.

For cooking utensils there was first and most important of all the chynik, or copper tea-kettle, and an ex-

tra one in case of accident. Then came a long-handled fry-pan, a large iron pot, a brass kettle, a saucepan, half a dozen tin plates, as many cups, spoons, and forks. Besides these there was a wash-basin, and each man carried a knife in a sheath attached to his belt.

At the head of the miscellaneous list came a fine rifle for Phil's especial use, and a double-barrelled shotgun, with an ample supply of fixed ammunition for both. Besides these Kurilla would carry his well-beloved old flint-lock musket. Then came three axes, one for each sledge, two hatchets, a case of awls, another of needles, a supply of stout thread and sinew for sewing, a thermometer, and a bolt of cotton cloth to be used as wanted.

Most important of all for a winter journey in that region of arctic cold was the outfit of fur clothing with which each of the boys was liberally provided, and some of which was made that very day by the nimble fingers of Indian women. In each case this consisted of a round, close-fitting fur cap of marten-skin; a heavy caribou parka, or outer shirt, trimmed with wolverene and wolf skin; an inner shirt of softest fawn-skin, trousers of Siberian reindeer, boots of moose-shank and seal, plenty of moccasins and fur-lined arctic socks, and two pairs of mittens that reached to the elbow. Of these the outer pair was of moose-hide lined with heavy flannel, while the inner pair, the right hand of which had a trigger finger as well as a thumb, was made of lynx, with the fur inside.

A warm sleeping-bag for each boy was made by taking a fine and extra heavy Mackinaw blanket, lining it with marmot-skins, fur side out, covering the other side with stout canvas as a protection against sparks and the wet of melting snow, and sewing up the edges. This, with a small pillow filled with geese feathers and a large bear-skin, constituted an arctic bed in which one

might sleep out-of-doors with comfort in the coldest of weather.

These things, together with snow-shoes and native snow-goggles, made of wood pierced with a long slit and blackened on the inside, completed the outfit of our young travellers. They were to use the ingalik, or regular Yukon sledge, which is much lighter than the Eskimo, or coast sledge, but heavier and stronger than the Hudson Bay toboggan commonly used in the interior.

The getting together of these things occupied all hands for the greater part of the day, though after satisfying himself as to his outfit of fur garments Phil left the rest to Serge and Gerard Hamer, for he had another very important duty to perform. This was arranging the exhibition drill of his native soldier boys, who had looked forward to it with such eagerness that he could not bear to disappoint them.

Fortunately the day was fine and not very cold, for the school-room was so utterly inadequate to the accommodation of both performers and spectators that the drill was necessarily held outside.

Noon was the hour appointed for this most important event, and by that hour the space reserved for spectators was occupied by every inhabitant of the native village. Their curiosity was raised to the highest pitch of expectation, for the boys had kept their secret so well that no one knew anything concerning the nature of the exhibition.

For some minutes excitement was kept at fever heat by strange sounds issuing from behind the closed school-house doors, where the company was forming. Then the door was flung open, and to the measured beating of a drum that gruff Mr. Sims had made for Little Sidorka, who was Big Sidorka's brother, and at that moment the proudest boy in Anvik, the dusky



THE EXHIBITION DRILL, AT ANYIK

company marched forth in single file, headed by Big Sidorka, who still wore the badge of honor that made him the envied of all his fellows. Phil came last, and at his command of "Company, *halt!* Right *face!* Right *dress!* 'Tention!" the long line stood straight and motionless facing their awe-stricken relatives.

Then came in rapid succession the sharp, crisp orders now so familiar to nearly every school-boy in the United States, but never before heard by the public of Anvik: "Present *arms!* Carry *arms!* Right shoulder *arms!*" and the rest, until every movement of the manual had been executed with a promptness and precision that drew forth a storm of applause from the delighted spectators. But when Phil handed his wooden sword to Sergeant Sidorka, and the company was put through the same drill without a mistake by one of their own number, the enthusiasm of the on-lookers knew no bounds.

Then the company was put through the few simple marching manœuvres that it had been able to practise in the limited area of the school-room. Finally, when, at the command "Charge *bayonets!* Double quick *march!*" it advanced on the run with levelled guns directly towards its admiring friends, they scurried away in every direction with apprehensive screams as though their brothers had become sure enough soldiers, armed with real guns, and bent upon their destruction.

At the conclusion of the exercises Phil promoted Sergeant Sidorka to a captaincy, formally turned over the command of the company to him, and hung about his neck a medal beaten out of a silver dollar and engraved with the single word "Captain." To this day if there is a prouder young fellow in all Alaska than Big Sidorka, or a more exacting drill-master, it would be hard to find him.

Serge bade his reading-class farewell that evening,

and commended them to the kindness of Mr. Sims, the engineer, who to the surprise of every one had volunteered to continue the work so successfully begun by the young Russo-American.

That evening, too, Gerald Hamer gave Phil a list of goods that the *Chimo* would take to the Forty Mile Mining Camp in the spring, and the prices at which they would be sold. He also gave him money enough to defray the expenses of a trip to San Francisco, and a long letter of instructions to the agent of the new trading company in that city. This Phil was to supplement by a verbal statement of the condition of affairs in the Yukon diggings, and the class of goods most in demand.

Thus was everything made ready for the morrow, on which Phil and Serge were to set forth on a mid-winter search through the vast Alaskan wilderness for the former's dearly loved father, and begin the tremendous journey which they hoped would carry them to the very head-waters of the Yukon, and finally land them in green Sitka town.

CHAPTER XIII

MUSIC OF THE SLEDGE-BELLS

THE cold winter morning that succeeded that memorable day at the Anvik Mission witnessed an animated scene in the open space between its stout log buildings. Fur-clad figures hurried in all directions, bringing last things and finishing the lading of the three sledges that were to constitute the up-river brigade. To each of these were attached seven dogs, it having been decided at the last moment to add two extra haulers to each team, as both dogs and fish for their feed were much cheaper at Anvik than they would be beyond that point. Then, too, with such strong teams a high degree of speed could be maintained, for while two of the sledges carried six hundred pounds each, the third was laden with but half that weight, so that if either of the boys became exhausted he could ride, and so avoid the necessity of a halt.

Each dog's harness was composed of three bands of seal-skin, two of which passed over his back and were toggled or buttoned under the belly, while the third, which was extended into traces, crossed his chest. The leader was attached to the end of a long pulling thong of walrus hide, while the traces of the other dogs, who ran in pairs, were knotted and made fast to the same line at proper intervals. The two steer-dogs were hitched directly to the hauling-bar in front of the sledge.

The load of each sledge, enveloped in stout canvas,

was immovably bound to it by a simple but ingenious net-work of raw-hide lashing, so that the whole might roll over and over without being loosened or disarranged.

At ten o'clock, or just as the laggard sun of those short days was rising, the last hearty handshakes were exchanged, the fervent "God bless yous" and final farewells were uttered, and the start was made.

Kurilla, who was to act as runner and break a trail through the snow, went first. Then came Phil's team, with the string of tiny bells attached to Musky's harness jingling merrily in the frosty air; after him followed Serge, whose cheery good-nature and ready helpfulness had won for him a warm place in every Anvik heart; and the rear was brought up by Chitsah.

On the very brow of the steep descent to the river Phil turned for a parting wave of his hand and a last glance at the place that had grown to seem so much like home in the past six weeks. His less sentimental dogs sprang down the narrow track with such suddenness that poor Phil, who still held to the sledge with one hand, was jerked abruptly forward, threw the sledge from the path in his effort to save himself, and plunged with it down the bank. By thus taking a header, Phil, his dogs, and his sledge reached the bottom even in advance of Kurilla, sadly demoralized, but except for a few bruises and a terrible snarl of trace-lines none the worse for the accident.

When a few minutes later Serge reached the spot with his anxious and now familiar inquiry, Phil cut him short by saying,

"No, old man, I'm not hurt, though, of course, I might have been. But I was willing to risk it for your sake."

"For my sake!" cried Serge, in amazement.

"Yes, to set you an example in promptness of move-

ment. You know I have always said we would never get to Sitka unless we took advantage of every opportunity, and pressed forward with all possible speed."

"Oh, pshaw!" laughed Serge. "You remind me of a story I heard in New London. An old Quaker was driving along a country road with his boy sitting in the back of the cart. Suddenly the horse shied, and the boy was thrown out, whereupon the old man remarked, quietly, 'Be thankful for thy mercies, son, for if thee'd fell in a particellar way thee'd broke thy neck.'"

"Well, I didn't," replied Phil, "though I'm sure I fell in a very particular way—at least, it was particularly unexpected."

In a few minutes Kurilla's deft fingers had repaired all damages, and disentangled the apparently hopeless snarl of dogs. Then the train was once more set in motion, and, as it swept out on the broad surface of the frozen river, was headed due north for the first stage of its long journey. Fainter and fainter came the music of its sledge-bells to those who watched its departure. Its receding figures lessened until they were but black specks against the illimitable expanse of white, and finally vanished in the snow glint of its wavering horizon.

To Phil Ryder, however, there was no vanishing about the seven dogs that he was attempting to drive. They were right before his eyes, where he was obliged to keep them pretty constantly, too; for if he looked away for an instant they knew it, and seized the opportunity for mischief. There was not a lump of ice, a hillock of snow, or a bit of drift that one or all of them did not wish to smell of and investigate. If there was an obstruction to be passed, three of them would try to go on one side of it and four on the other. At sight of a rabbit scurrying across the frozen field, they would

give tongue and set forth in hot pursuit. Above all, each of the five belonging to the original team was spoiling for a fight with one or both of the new-comers, to whom Phil had given the names of Lofter and Brassy. If he glanced back to shout to Serge, Musky would double on his tracks and spring at the throat of the unoffending Lofter, who would abjectly roll on his back with a howl of apprehension; Amook would snap at his heels; Luvtuk would wheel upon Brassy; and by the time Phil's eye again rested on his team they would be engaged in such a battle as would gladden the heart of a city gamin. Then Kurilla would rush back, seize Phil's whip, and crack it about their ears with such frightful reports that, in their frantic efforts to escape, the offending dogs would only entangle themselves still more hopelessly. In the meantime, the other teams, thus forced to a halt, would sit on their haunches, or lie in comfortable attitudes, and lift their voices in sympathetic howls.

Finally, when this thing happened for about the tenth time, Phil exclaimed:

"Look here, Kurilla, you and I must change places, for I can't stand this any longer. Besides, with the present arrangement, we are spending more time disentangling dogs than we are in travelling. I don't somehow seem to have learned the A B C of sledge driving; but I am getting along pretty well with the shoes, and believe I can walk ahead and tread out a trail as well as any one."

"All light," answered the obliging fellow. "You walk, me come. Me come fas', you walk more fas', yaas." Then, with a broad grin, he whirled Phil's relinquished badge of authority about his head in such a manner as gave the dogs to understand that they must now attend strictly to business or take the consequences.

So Phil assumed the leadership of the expedition, and from that moment, though always willing to accept advice from the others, he never dropped it.

When, shortly after three o'clock, the sun completed its short course, and again reached the southern horizon, he asked Kurilla if it were not about time to make camp; but the Indian answered:

“No; go far as can make dog plenty tired. S'posin' no git tired; night come, run to Anvik. Bad dog, yaas. Git tired, night come, no run, sleep; good dog, yaas.”

“Oh, that's the scheme, is it?” laughed Phil. “Well, I guess I can stand it as long as the rest can, though I must confess I am about tired enough to rank with the good dogs now.”

So in spite of lame ankles, and blistering heels, and toes that were very tender from having been repeatedly “stubbed” against the snow-shoe bars, the young leader trudged sturdily forward, with the dog-teams following close behind him. At length, when the dusk was merging into darkness, Kurilla called out:

“Now camp. Plenty wood. Heap fire, yaas.”

They were passing a spruce-and-hemlock-covered point, against which a pile of drift had lodged, and, gladly accepting the Indian's suggestion, Phil led the way towards it. Twenty miles of the journey had been accomplished, which, considering the late start and that it was the first day, was pronounced to be very good work.

For the next half-hour every one labored as though his very life depended upon what he could accomplish during those last precious moments of fading twilight. Phil and Kurilla made their keen axes ring merrily in an attack on the pile of dry drift-wood. Chitsah felled a spruce-tree, from which he cut two logs, each six feet long, and armful after armful of small branches. Serge

erected a low but stout scaffold, on which the sledges were to be placed to keep them out of the way of the omnivorous dogs, who in the meantime were lying down in their harness where they had been halted.

At the end of the half-hour a great back log twelve feet long and a smaller fore log had been placed in position, and enough dry wood collected to last until morning. The direction of the wind was noted, and the logs for the fire were so laid that it should blow along their length, instead of across them from either side. While Serge split kindlings and started his fire, the two Indians unharnessed the patient dogs. The harness, and especially the whips, were hung well beyond their reach, for they will eagerly chew at the former and invariably destroy the latter if by any means they can get at them. Then the hungry animals were fed, Serge leaving the fire to feed his own team, and Phil rejoicing that he had escaped this dangerous duty. Each dog was given a salmon weighing from one pound and a half to two pounds, and each, as he received his ration, gulped it down exactly as Amook had done on a previous occasion. They followed their meal with copious mouthfuls of snow that served instead of water.

Serge, who naturally slipped into the position of cook for the party, returned to the fire, which was now blazing finely and sending a stream of sparks dancing among the dark tree-tops. Phil busied himself with the bed that he and Serge were to share, while Kurilla and Chitsah would make theirs on the opposite side of the fire. He rolled one of the green logs into position close beside the fire for its foot-board, and then covered a space some six feet square behind it with flat spruce boughs, over which he spread a thick layer of hemlock tips. Above all he laid the two great bearskins, and on them threw the two sleeping-bags, each

MAKING CAMP THE FIRST NIGHT OUT



W.A. Rogers

of which had its owner's name done in black paint on its white canvas, and contained his personal belongings.

Everything needed for the night being now taken from the sledges, the Indians lifted them, with the remainder of their loads, to the scaffold, on which were also placed the snow-shoes. Then they made their own bed—a very simple affair as compared with the one constructed by Phil. With this the work of preparing camp was finished, for in that far north land there is no pitching of tents by winter *voyageurs*. These are considered useless encumbrances in sledge travel, where every pound of weight must be considered. They are not needed as a protection against rain, for it is certain that no rain will fall with the mercury below zero, and they would be liable to catch fire from the roaring blaze that is kept up all night.

So in the present case there was nothing more to be done save wait as patiently as might be for supper—and this Phil declared to be the hardest job he had tackled that day.

CHAPTER XIV

WINTER TRAVEL BENEATH THE ARCTIC AURORA

WITH the advent of darkness and the dying out of the wind there came such an increase of cold that from all parts of the forest were heard sharp, crackling sounds caused by the cruel pinchings of a bitter frost. Phil had thrust his thermometer into the snow at the head of his bed, and was surprised to find, on looking at it, that it already registered fifteen degrees below zero. He had been so warmed with violent exercise that it had not seemed so very cold; but now he shivered and drew closer to the fire.

For his cooking, Serge was first obliged to melt snow in order to obtain water; but now the teakettle was singing merrily, bacon and dried venison were sizzling together in the capacious fry-pan; and on the opposite side of the fire the two Indians were rapturously sniffing the delicious odors that came from it. They were toasting a fat salmon impaled on a slender stick, and at the same time whetting their appetite by frequent bites from a lump of pemmican that was handed from one to the other.

Phil asked for a bit of this when Serge took it from its bag, for, he said, "I have read of pemmican all my life, and from the amount of praise bestowed on it by the writers, think it must be pretty fine eating." So he tried it, took one mouthful, and flung the rest to Musky, who had drawn close to him, and was watching his experiment with undisguised interest.

“Whew-w!” sputtered Phil, ejecting the tasteless morsel from his mouth. “If that’s pemmican, then those who like it may keep it to themselves; but I certainly don’t want any more of it. I suppose, though, it is because my taste has not been cultivated to appreciate it any more than it has raw seal’s liver and similar dainties.”

Before supper both Phil and Serge afforded the Indians considerable amusement by devoting a basin of the precious water to a thorough cleansing of their faces and hands. Kurilla and Chitsah not only considered this a waste of time, water, and soap, but, as the former remarked, with an expressive shake of his head:

“No good. More clean, more quick git dirty, yaas.”

“Which sentiment,” said Phil, in a low tone, to Serge, “explains why Indians and Eskimos and the like generally sit on one side of the fire when white men occupy the other.”

Throwing a handful of tea into the chynik, lifting it from the fire the moment it again came to a boil, and then setting it in a warm place to “draw,” Serge next removed the cooked meat from the fry-pan to a heated plate. Into the hot grease that remained he placed a double handful of broken biscuit, previously soaked for a few minutes in the brass kettle. When this had absorbed every drop of grease and begun to brown, it was ready to be eaten with molasses as a dessert.

“One of the very best dinners I ever ate in all my life, old man!” declared Phil, after half an hour of uninterrupted devotion to plate and cup. “I believe it is fully equal to that gorgeous spread you had ready for me on Oonimak after my experience with the sea-otter hunters. As for the tea! Well, I never realized before what a good thing tea is, and how much a fellow can drink of it. Have I had six or twenty of those

big tin cups full? No matter, it's either one or the other, and every one of them has gone right to the spot where it will do the most good. Wouldn't my Aunt Ruth be horrified, though, if she could see us dispose of that amount of straight tea? She used to consider one small cup, with plenty of milk in it, about the proper thing for a boy's daily allowance. But then Aunt Ruth never enjoyed the advantage of drinking her tea out-of-doors, with the mercury away down below freezing."

"Don't you mean below zero?" suggested Serge, who was refilling the chynik with hot water, and setting it on to boil, that what virtue still remained in the tea-leaves might be extracted for the use of the Indians.

"Certainly not!" retorted Phil. "Why, it has grown at least twenty degrees warmer during the past half-hour." So saying, he reached for the thermometer and held it to the light, where, to his disgust, he saw that it registered three degrees lower than when he last looked, or eighteen degrees below zero.

"You prevaricating old tin villyan!" he cried. "You are away off, and you know it. Oh, if I could only get one cup of that tea inside of you! It would bring you to your senses quick enough."

The Indians had their own wooden bowls, or "kantags," horn spoons, and tin cups, and while they ate their supper they were again amused by seeing Serge wash all his dishes and cooking utensils with hot, soapy water. They allowed their favorite dogs to lick their kantags clean, and it must be admitted that the operation was quickly and thoroughly performed.

After supper a line was rigged, and on it were hung mittens, travelling-boots, and the pads of dry grass that are worn inside of them as insoles. Serge set a big kettle of deer meat, pemmican, and oatmeal on the fire

to simmer into a stew for breakfast and lunch the next day. He also fixed a slab of snow where, as it melted, it would drip into the teakettle. By his advice Phil bathed his swollen ankles with water as hot as he could bear it and rubbed tallow on the blistered places. This treatment was to be followed by a dash of ice-water and a brisk rubbing the first thing in the morning.

On the other side of the fire the Indians indulged in the long-pipe smoke that after a hard day's work affords the chief enjoyment of their monotonous lives. When it was finished Kurilla went out for a final look at the sledges and dogs, and threw a couple more logs on the fire. Then he rolled up in his rabbit-skin robe for as many hours of sleep as he could obtain before it would be necessary to again replenish the fire and incidentally to take another smoke.

Removing only their heavy outer parkas, with their feet incased in soft arctic sleeping-socks, their heads protected by close-fitting fur caps, and sheltered from the cold by the triple thickness of their fur-lined sleeping-bags, Phil and Serge lay on their bear-skins, feet to the fire, and slept the untroubled sleep of tired and healthy youth. About them clustered the solemn trees of that Northern forest, just beyond lay the river frozen into white silence, and above all glowed the exquisite mysterious sky-tintings of an aurora, pervading all space with its flashing brilliancy quivering with ceaseless motion, though giving forth neither heat nor sound and but little light. With the rising moon frost crystals glistened in the air, and the long-drawn howl of a wolf echoed mournfully through the forest. Every dog in the camp promptly answered it, while Kurilla arose with a shiver and mended the fire; but of all this the two lads lying side by side on their rude couch knew nothing.

It was Phil who first awoke and looked out from his

warm nest. With a shudder at the bitterness of the air he would have withdrawn his head and snuggled down for another nap, but for two thoughts that just then flashed into his mind. One was of his father, whom he believed to be encamped within one hundred miles or so of him on that very river, and whom he was bound to overtake. The second thought was that as leader of the expedition it was his place to set the others an example. It would be pleasant to lie there and sleep until sunrise, but braver to set forth at once. In another minute he had struggled from the sleeping-bag, pulled on his heavy parka, and was shouting, cheerily:

“Come, wake up! wake up! Tumble out, all hands! Don’t you see the sun a-shining, and hear the little birds a-singing?”

“Looks more like the moon, and sounds like dogs,” growled Serge, sleepily, as he sat up and rubbed his eyes. “My! but it *is* cold!”

“Yes,” admitted Phil. “Fifty below at least, and more, I’ll be bound.”

It really seemed as cold as that, and when his thermometer showed only twenty degrees below zero he declared it to be a fraud, and unworthy of further consideration. None but those who have experienced similar conditions can imagine the misery of that camp-breaking and getting under way. The hunting from their snowy lairs and harnessing of unwilling dogs, the lashing of loads and the tying of knots with numbed fingers, the longing to hug the fire in one’s arms, and the hundred other forms of torture incident to the relentless cold, all combined to give Phil a rude foretaste of what that journey was to be. Amid all the wretchedness Serge was, as usual, the comforter, and with his smoking stew and hot tea did much towards restoring cheerfulness.

It wanted some hours to sunrise when the sledges

pulled out from camp, regained the river, and resumed their northward journey. The sky was overcast, and an ominous moaning sounded through the forest. Soon a breeze began to blow in angry gusts full in the faces of our travellers, and by sunrise it was sweeping furiously down the river, whirling the dry snow in blinding clouds and driving the icy particles with stinging force into face and eyes. Noses and cheeks became white and numb, the deadly cold was driven through fur and flannel until it penetrated the very marrow. Even the dogs plodded on with lowered heads and pitiful whimperings, while their masters were obliged to turn their backs to the gale every few minutes for breath and a momentary respite from the fierce struggle.

“’Tis *poorga*—yaas!” shouted Kurilla.

“Aye, *poorga!*” answered Serge, and for the first time Phil comprehended the full significance of the terrible word which means the wind of death.

By noon human endurance could hold out no longer, and, ready to drop with cold, pain, and exhaustion, Phil led his train to camp in a belt of timber so thick that even that fierce wind could not penetrate it, though among the tree-tops it shrieked and howled with demoniac fury.

Thus from camp to camp, through sunshine and darkness, storm and calm, stinging cold and whirling snows, the little party toiled onward, making twenty, thirty, and as high as forty miles a day. They passed the Indian settlement of Nulato, once a noted Russian trading-post, at the end of ten days’ travel, and a week later gained the mission station of old Fort Adams, four hundred miles from their point of departure. At several Indian villages they had heard of the party in advance of them, whose camps they also sometimes found. The trail was growing fresh, and at Fort

Adams they expected to gain definite information of those whom they sought, if indeed they did not overtake them at that point. At any rate, they would find a missionary there from whom they would surely receive news.

The first word obtained by Kurilla from the mission Indians, who swarmed forth to greet them, was that the missionary was absent, and that those whom they sought had passed only the day before. The second was that one of that party had returned but an hour previous, and was even now in the missionary's house.

"You fadder, yaas," added Kurilla, reassuringly, with a grin of delight, as he led Phil in that direction.

With a loudly beating heart the excited lad opened the door. There sat a man—a white man—in an attitude of the deepest dejection. He was long and lank. His fur garments ill became him. Phil's heart sank; for in this uncouth figure there was no trace of his own dear father. Then, as the woe-begone face was slowly turned to meet his, he uttered a gasping shout of amazed recognition.

"Jalap Coombs, by all that is wonderful!"



"YOU FADDER, YAAS"

CHAPTER XV

PHIL HEARS FROM HIS FATHER

MONTHS before Phil and Serge had bidden farewell to Jalap Coombs in an ancient barrabkie on Oonimak Island. They believed they were only leaving him for a short time, but on their return he had disappeared, nor from that day to this had they learned anything concerning him. Now, to have him reappear in this mysterious manner in an Indian village hundreds of miles up the Yukon River, apparently friendless and alone, was so incredible that, after his first exclamation, Phil stepped closer and took another look at the weather-beaten face to establish its identity beyond a doubt.

“Oh, it’s me, son! It’s me, fast enough!” cried the ex-mate of the *Seamew*, in a voice that trembled with joyful emotion, as he sprang to his feet and grasped Phil’s hand in his. At the same time a suspicious dimness came into his eyes that he brushed away hastily.

“It’s the same old Jalap,” he continued, “and only one minute ago he were about as forlorn *and* miserable a sailor-man as ever were stranded a thousand miles from salt water. Now, seeing that in sich a short space of time he’s been h’isted from the hold of grief to the main-r’yal mast-head of happiness by the sight of your blessed phiz, ye mustn’t be surprised to find his rigging at loose ends and decks generally cluttered up. But the squall’s blown over, lad. You’ve brought fair weather, and I’ll have the old packet ship-shape *and*

Bristol fashion again in a shake. What I sartainly orter done was to remember my old friend Kite Roberson's advice consarning squalls. I've spoke to ye of old Kite afore, hain't I?"

"The name sounds familiar," replied Phil. "But how in the name of—"

"Waal, ef I didn't I'd orter, for Kite were one of the finest of men. Why, me and him—"

"Oh yes, now I remember," assented Phil. "What did he say about squalls?"

"That in all his experience he never see a squall so heavy but what fair weather 'd come after it sooner or later. But Phil, my son, where hev you dropped from? Where's your shipmate? And where's that bloomin' shark of a cap'n what carried ye off right from under your own father's very eyes?"

"My father!" shouted Phil. "What do you know about my father? Have you ever seen him? Where is he? Has he gone on up the river?"

"Yes," cried Serge, entering at that moment and greeting his old friend with extended hand; "that is what we want to know first of all. Where is Mr. Ryder? They told me he was in here with Phil, so I waited outside until certain that the only other voice was yours, and then I ventured in."

"Of course ye did, and I'm prouder to see you than ef ye were the King of all the Rooshias *and* Chiny to boot. But consarning your father, Phil. Have I ever seed him, say you? Waal, occasionally, considering as me and him cruised together for nigh two months in Bering Sea sarching for you boys. When we finally come up with ye in Norton Sound and see that you were steaming right ahead, paying no attention to signals, it mighty nigh broke your father's heart. It stopped a bit short of that, though, and only broke his leg instead, at which the swab as were steering run the

schooner aground on a mud bank. Then by the time I'd got Mr. Ryder below and come on deck again you were hull down."

"Do you mean that my father actually broke one of his legs?" queried Phil, who could not believe he had heard aright.

"Sartain I do," was the answer. "You see, we were aboard an old tub named *Philomeel*, which we had chartered her in Oonalaska for a cruise to Oonimak to pick you up. Thar we fell in with a revenoo-cutter, and she sent us up to the islands."

"Not the *Phoca*?"

"The very same, with Miss May and Cap'n Matthews in command. At the islands we heerd of ye through an Injin chap who had piloted your ship."

"Nikrik!" exclaimed Serge.

"Nikrik were his name," assented Jalap Coombs. "So we give chase, laid a course for St. Michaels, and got there in time for Mr. Ryder to make you out through his glass. Then he thought he had ye for sure, though I give him one of old Kite Roberson's warnings. But he didn't take no notice, and were climbing the main rigging to make a signal for ye to heave to, when a ratlin' give way and dropped him on deck. The man at the wheel jumped to save him, and so did I, but it warn't no use. He'd broke his leg, and the old *Philomeel* took a sheer into the mud."

"Poor father!" sighed Phil. "Now I know why I've been worrying about him. I can't understand, though, how he could undertake such a terrible journey with a broken leg."

"Why not? They made him as comfortable as ef he were in his own home. Besides, there warn't nothing else to be did."

"Comfortable! with a broken leg, on a dog-sledge trip of a thousand miles through an arctic wilderness

in midwinter!" cried Phil. "Seems to me any one who could find comfort under those conditions might live in luxury on an iceberg in the Polar Sea."

"Which it has been did," replied the mate, gravely. "But it begins to look as ef me and you was sailing on different tacks. Where is it that you suppose your father to be at this blessed minute?"

"Somewhere on the Yukon, not more than a day's journey from here, though when I entered this room just now I fully expected to see him," replied Phil, who had so long cherished the hope of a speedy meeting with his father that he could not even relinquish the idea of his proximity.

"Yes," added Serge, "that is what we were told, and we have come nearly four hundred miles up the river in search of him."

It was now Jalap Coombs's turn to stare in amazement. At length he said: "So you're spending the winter up here hunting him, be ye, while he spent the best part of the summer down there hunting you? Seems to me it's a leetle the most mixed-up hunting I ever were consarned in. But it only goes to prove what my old friend Kite Roberson useter offen say. Hé useter say, Kite did, that the best way to find a man is to set still in some likely place till he comes by; but I never could hardly believe it till this minute. Now I can see that ef Phil had set in Victoria his father would have found him. Ef he'd set on the *Seamew* he'd found his father in Sitka. Ef he'd set on the cutter they'd met at Oonimak. Ef he'd set at the islands he'd seen his father come that way afore long, and the same at the Redoubt. Likewise ef Mr. Ryder had set at St. Michaels in place of going to San Francisco on the *Bear*, Phil would find him there when he goes back from here. Yes, old Kite were a wiser man than most, though you'd never believe it to see him."

“You say that my father has gone to San Francisco. Why did he do that?” queried the still bewildered boy.

“To dock for repairs. You see, the *Bear* were the last ship of the season to go out, and so she were his only chance. She had a wracked crew aboard as were willing to carry the *Philomeel* back to Oonalaska, and that left me free to continue the search for you boys.”

“Well,” said Phil, “of course it’s an awful disappointment to find that I’m not to meet my father—at least, not for some months to come—after all the trouble I’ve taken to find him. At the same time I am glad to know that he is safely out of this country for the winter, even if it did take a broken leg to persuade him of the foolishness of hunting for me. I should think he might have found out long before that, though, how well able Serge and I were to take care of ourselves. Poor dear pop! How he must have suffered! I only hope he will stay quietly in San Francisco until I can get to him. Did he say how long he would wait there?”

“Only till sich time as he got his leg spliced and is able to travel. Then he’s got to come back to Sitka and settle up his business.”

“In that case things are working out all right, after all,” said Phil, “for Sitka is the very place we are bound for at this very minute.”

“But he warn’t going to stop there,” continued Jalap Coombs, “only till the first spring ship left for St. Michaels, when he reckoned to take passage on her and come up after you.”

“But how did he expect to find us at St. Michaels in the spring when he knew we left there in September?”

“Because the very cruise I’m shipped for is to find you, pilot you back there, and moor alongside of ye till he heaves in sight again. You see, he’s taken a notion

that he'd like to come up the river and have a look at the diggings, which he don't feel that he can till he has you once more in tow. So, seeing as I were out of a berth for the winter, and we heerd as you were froze in somewheres up here on the river, I took the contract to hunt ye and fetch ye back. I'll allow, though, that things was looking pretty dubious for me awhile ago, and ef you hadn't hove in sight as ye did I'd been all at sea without compass or yet a chart. Now, though, it's all plain sailing again, and—"

"Is it?" interrupted Phil. "Seems to me this whole affair is about as completely snarled as any I ever had anything to do with, unless it was a fighting dog-team. To begin with— But, I say, suppose we have supper first and discuss the situation afterwards. I for one am too hungry to think."

"If you are any more hungry than I am you are hungry enough to be dangerous," laughed Serge; while Jalap Coombs remarked that supper was the very thing he was considering when Phil entered the room. "And a mighty poor lookout it were," he added, "for I hadn't any grub, nor didn't know the best place to steal any, nor yet warn't quite hungry enough to steal a supper anyway. So I were jest concluding to go without, same as I did for dinner. But ef you boys has got anything to eat—"

"Have we?" cried Phil; "you just wait and see. Serge, did you know this was Christmas Day?"

"No," laughed Serge, "for it isn't."

"Well, it is so near to it, and this meeting is such a joyous occasion, that I move we trot out our mincepies, and plum-puddings, and roast turkeys, and pemmican, and things, and have a regular Christmas blow-out. That is, always supposing that Mr. Coombs will loan us the use of his house. This is your house, is it not, Mr. Coombs?"

“Sartain it is,” replied the mate, with a grin, and entering fully into Phil’s absurdities. “Leastways, there ain’t no one come to turn me out of it yet. So you’re as welcome to it as I be. For, as old Kite Roberson useter say—”

“Let’s have him for dessert,” laughed Phil, as he started outside to discover what had become of the sledges.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MATE'S STORY

It is doubtful if there was a happier party in the Yukon Valley, or even in all Alaska, than that which unbidden, though none the less certain of their welcome, took possession of the mission-house at old Fort Adams that roaring December night. Certainly no one could be happier than was Jalap Coombs at this meeting with the boys in whose fortunes his had become so strangely involved. At the time of their opportune appearance he was in one of the most unhappy and perplexing predicaments of his whole checkered career; but now his troubles were blown away like a morning mist, and already wellnigh forgotten.

When the schooner *Philomel*, finally released from the bank on which she had grounded, reached St. Michaels, Mr. Ryder was greatly distressed by the accounts given him of the expedition on which Phil and Serge had embarked. Knowing nothing of the conditions under which they had been so glad to accept the friendly offer of a roundabout passage to Sitka, and receiving a cruelly false impression of Gerald Hamer's character as well as of his objects in ascending the Yukon, he concluded that the boys had been trapped into a reckless venture, which could only lead them to disaster and suffering. In fancy he saw them imprisoned by an arctic winter on a wretchedly constructed and poorly equipped boat, as the *Chimo* was described to him, or in some squalid Indian village, confronted by

freezing, starvation, and disease, remote from human aid and without the means of escape.

Bitterly did he deplore the accident that prevented him from organizing a relief party and going in person to their rescue. When, on the day after his own arrival, the revenue-cutter *Bear* touched at St. Michaels on her way south and her commander offered him a passage to San Francisco, where he could receive the surgical attendance he so greatly needed, he at first refused, declaring that nothing would induce him to leave the country without his boy Phil.

Then it was that Jalap Coombs offered to remain in his place, make an overland trip to the Yukon as soon as winter travel should be practicable, find the boys, and bring them back to St. Michaels, there to await Mr. Ryder's return in the spring.

"But you know nothing of the country nor of sledge travel," objected the latter. "You will not even know on what portion of the river to look for the boys. And, besides, what shall we do with the *Philomel*, which has already cost me more than I can well afford?"

"It is true, sir, as you say, that I am ignorant of the cruising-ground," replied Jalap Coombs, "but I'd be a poor sailor-man ef with chart and compass I couldn't make out to lay a course. Also, I've heerd of a party as expects to start from here on a visit to all the up-river trading-stations as soon as the season for sledge navigation opens, and I reckon there wouldn't be no difficulty about me shipping with them as extry hand.

"As for driving dogs, my old friend Kite Roberson useter say that a man can l'arn any trade ef he has to. At the same time I'm considerable handy with both belaying-pins and rope-ends, which, I take it, would be jest as improving to the usefulness of dogs as to a crew of swabs. When it comes to getting the bearings of the

port in which the lads are laid by for the winter, that would seem to be a case of the plainest kind of sailing. They're bound to be friz in afore long, even ef their old kettle doesn't break down and leave 'em stranded, which it's likely it will. Waal, then, I strikes across country from here to the river, and says to the natyves what lives on its banks: 'Has sich and sich a steamer gone up stream?' says I; which ef they answers *si*, or *oui*, or *ja*, or whatever stands for yes in their lingo, I likewise goes on up. Ef they shakes their heads, which is 'No' the world over, then I naturally goes down, and keeps on down till I meets her."

In spite of his present pain and mental distress Mr. Ryder could not help smiling at the readiness with which the simple-minded sailor thus disposed of difficulties that to most people would appear insurmountable. "But what shall we do with the *Philomel*?" he asked, after a few moments' consideration.

"Send her back to Oonalaska in charge of the wracked whaling cap'n what has just come in on the *Bear*. He'll take her and be glad of the job, for I've already sounded him."

The more Mr. Ryder thought over the plan thus proposed by the man who had already proved himself so capable, so loyal, and so stanch a friend of the lost boys, the more favorably he was inclined towards it, and at length he decided to accept the mate's proffered services. So with many parting injunctions, and leaving with him a sum of money sufficient to defray his share of expenses in the proposed expedition, Phil's father sailed away on the *Bear* in search of the medical aid that should enable him to return a few months later, and undertake, in company with his boy, a long-cherished scheme of exploration among the fabled gold-fields of the interior.

Some six weeks later Jalap Coombs also set forth

from St. Michaels in company with two white men, both of whom expressed an ardent admiration for Phil Ryder, and great joy at the prospect of assisting in his rescue from the wiles of the unprincipled trader who had lured him away. Under their direction the confiding sailor invested the entire sum left him by Mr. Ryder in dogs, sledges, and provisions. He was amazed at the exorbitant prices charged him for these things, and was still more so to discover, when a few days out from the fort, that with all his outlay he was credited with but one team and a single sledge-load of provisions, which he soon found himself exchanging for fish with which to feed his dogs.

Furthermore, as he had been unable to master the art of dog-driving, his obliging friends had engaged for him an Indian, who began to demand his wages at the end of the first week, refused to work unless he was paid in advance, and persisted in his demands with such insolence that the mate finally felt himself obliged to administer what he called a dose of belaying-pins and rope-ends. The effect of this was a future obedience to orders, accompanied by a sullen hatred, which Jalap's white companions seemed to take a malicious delight in encouraging.

This sledge party went north along the coast from St. Michaels to the mouth of the Unalaklik River, and followed up that stream for several days. Then, crossing a divide, they struck the Yukon at a point near Nulato. Here they were told that a steamer, supposed to be the *Chimo*, had passed on her way up the river several days before the close of navigation.

By this time the relations between poor Jalap and his companions had become so very unpleasant that he had hoped for an excuse to leave them, and go down the river from Nulato. As it was, he now felt obliged

to continue in their company until the *Chimo* should be overtaken.

At old Fort Adams, after conferring with the natives, his fellow-travellers informed him that the steamer was frozen in about one day's march above that place, and with a lighter heart than he had known since beginning the weary journey, he again set forth with them, filled with eager anticipations. When just at dusk of that same day they discovered a steamer snugly moored to the bank, he read her name with a sinking heart, for, instead of *Chimo*, it was *St. Michaels*, which he knew to be the name of a boat belonging to a Catholic mission on the lower river. Moreover, she was boarded up and deserted.

As Jalap's companions noted his expression of dismay, they uttered shouts of mocking laughter, and asked what else he had expected when the Fort Adams Indians had mentioned that very name so plainly that a deaf man ought to have understood it.

In camp that night the sailor announced his intention of starting back down the river at daybreak, at which the others only exchanged significant glances, but said nothing. In the morning, after the sledges were loaded and the dogs harnessed, it was discovered that the driver of his sledge was missing. Telling him that he was thus rightly served for chastising the poor man, the others cracked their whips and started off up the river, leaving poor Jalap standing on its bank helpless and alone. A few moments later, at the sound of a familiar whistle from the direction they had taken, his dogs started after their vanished companions, carrying with them his entire outfit.

With feet so badly used up from weeks of unaccustomed snow-shoeing that every step was torture, the deserted man at once realized the folly of pursuit, and with a heavy heart began to retrace his slow way to



A FEW MOMENTS LATER HIS DOGS STARTED AFTER THEIR VANISHED COMPANIONS

old Fort Adams. Reaching the mission completely exhausted, and unable to proceed farther, he had taken possession of the missionary's house. Here, suffering, penniless, friendless, and almost hopeless, he was trying to form some plan for the future, when the door opened, and, as he afterwards quaintly said, "Ef the good little cherub what sets up aloft watching over poor Jack at sea had flowed in at that minute, I couldn't been better pleased than I were to sight the blessed phiz of that precious young rascal, Phil Ryder."

Such was the tale related by Jalap Coombs to Phil and Serge after the three had finished a dinner that included every luxury in the outfit of our young travelers, and between long, grateful pulls at "old comfort," his pipe, which they had also provided with tobacco.

When the story was ended, Phil indignantly demanded to know the names of the two white men who claimed acquaintance with him and at the same time dared treat his old friend so shamefully.

"Simon Goldollar were the name of one."

"I might have known it—the sneak!" broke in Phil.

"And the other are called Strengel."

"The very scoundrel that I set ashore from the *Chimo* for trying to blow her up!" cried Phil. "You remember, Serge?"

"I should rather say I did!" replied the young Russo-American, his honest face flushing with anger.

"But what are they going up the river for, Mr. Coombs?"

"To spile Cap'n Hamer's chance of doing any trading at Forty Mile, as fur as I could make out," replied the mate.

"Oh, the villains!" exclaimed Phil. "And they have got two days' start of us, too, while you are almost un-

fit for travel. Hold on, though! I have it! We can do the trick yet, and give them a lesson in minding their own business. Hurrah for our side, after all! Serge, hurrah! quick, before I fling something at you.”

CHAPTER XVII

JALAP COOMBS'S FOURTEEN PAIR OF FEET

"OF course, Mr. Coombs, you can't expect us to go back to St. Michaels now," began Phil, as a preliminary to unfolding his scheme for the discomfiture of Simon Goldollar and his unprincipled companion.

"Why not?" demanded the sailor, who had not for a moment expected anything else. "As soon as I found ye I were to bring ye to St. Michaels, and keep ye there till your father comes. Them's orders, and to disobey 'em would be mutiny, nigh as I kin make out."

"That would be all right if you had found us; but you haven't."

"Eh?" queried Jalap Coombs. "I hain't found ye?"

"Certainly not," laughed Phil. "Instead of you finding us, we have found you. If you had struck us at Anvik, it is possible that we might have gone back with you, but as we have found you some four hundred miles from there, we shall certainly do nothing of the kind. You see, to begin with, we are under the greatest of obligations to Captain Hamer, who, by-the-way, is one of the finest men I ever met."

Here Phil told of the terrible experience he and Serge had undergone in Bering Sea, and of their gallant rescue by Gerald Hamer, all of which the absorbed listener now heard for the first time.

"Now," continued the lad, "we have left him just recovering from a dangerous illness, and unfitted to travel for some months. If he can't get word out to

the coast before spring he will be a heavy loser. So Serge and I have undertaken to carry and deliver the message for him. Our entire outfit, down to the very clothing we wear, was furnished by him on that condition. It is also our duty to try and defeat the plans of his enemies, who are also our enemies, and now seem to have become yours as well. So you see we are in honor bound to push on with all speed. Besides all this, we certainly ought to be able to reach Sitka long before my father can get away from there, and so save him a long, tedious, and useless journey."

"I'm not so sartain of that," demurred Jalap Coombs. "For ye've been trying to make Sitka long 's ever I've knowed ye, which is going on a year now, and hain't come anywhere nigh to it yet. Still, as my old friend Kite Roberson useter say, 'Jalap, my son, allers steer by sarcumstances; for as a general thing they'll p'int straighter 'n a compass,' and I am free to admit that your present sarcumstances is p'inting pretty direct towards Sitka. But how do ye propose to sarcumvent the villyans what run off with my dogs?"

"Now you are talking straight business," laughed Phil. "As I understand it, the main object of those fellows is to capture the next season's trade of the Yukon Valley, and especially of the diggings at Forty Mile, by taking advance orders at lower rates than the old company has ever before offered. Even then their prices are certain to be exorbitant, and with Gerald Hamer's list I am certain I can underbid them. But that won't be of any use unless we can be first in the field, for after the orders are given and contracts signed those other chaps could laugh at us and our prices. So our only hope is to reach Forty Mile ahead of them."

"Which ye can't do it without wings or steam," objected Jalap Coombs, "seeing as they has got two good days' start on ye."

"I wouldn't care if they had six days' start," answered Phil. "I am confident that we could still beat them with just ordinary snow-shoes and sledges and plain every-day North American dogs. They have gone around the great arctic bend of the Yukon, haven't they? And so have a journey of at least seven hundred miles ahead of them before they reach Forty Mile."

"Yes," replied Jalap. "They said as it were the only navigable channel."

"Well, it isn't, for I know of another that is equally good, and two hundred miles or so shorter. You see, there is a big river coming from the southeast and emptying into the Yukon somewhere in this vicinity, called the Tanana."

"That's right," assented the sailor, "for I've already passed its mouth twice about half-way between here and where the *St. Michaels* is friz in."

"Good enough," said Phil. "Now by following this Tanana for two or three hundred miles, and taking up one of its eastern branches that is called the Gheesah, or some such name, and crossing a divide, we can strike the headwaters of Forty Mile Creek."

"And sail down with the current, run into port under a full press of canvas, and capture the market afore the enemy heaves in sight!" exclaimed Jalap Coombs, enthusiastically, his practical mind quick to note the advantages of Phil's scheme. "But what's to become of me?" he added, anxiously. "Kin ye fit me out with a new pair of feet?"

"Certainly we can," replied Phil, promptly. "We can fit you out with fourteen new pair, and will guarantee that, thus provided, you will be able to travel as fast as the rest of us."

"Fourteen pair o' feet?" repeated Jalap Coombs, reflectively, "and slow-shoes on every pair? Seems to me, son, you must be calkilating to run me under a

kind of a santipede rig, which it looks like the strain on the hull would be too great. As for navigating fourteen pair of slow-shoes all to once, I don't reckon old Kite hisself could do it. Still, if you think it can be did, why go ahead and try it on. I'm agreeable, as the cat said after he'd swallowed the cap'n's wife's canary."

So Phil's plan was adopted without a dissenting voice, and from that moment Jalap Coombs said nothing more about a return to St. Michaels.

That very evening, leaving Serge to see what could be done for the sailor-man's lameness, and taking Kurilla with him to act as interpreter, Phil visited several Indian huts. At these he finally succeeded in purchasing enough furs and moose-hide for a huge sleeping-bag, which the several squaws, who, under promise of a liberal recompense in tea, undertook its construction, promised should be ready by morning. Phil also bought an immense pair of arctic sleeping-socks and an extra supply of snow-goggles.

When he told Kurilla of their change of plan, and that they intended going up the Tanana, the latter replied, dubiously, "Me plenty don't know um. Maybe git lose. Yaas."

"Oh, that'll be all right," answered Phil, cheerfully. "You'll plenty know um before we get through with um, and whenever you don't know which way to go, just come and ask me."

When he returned to the house he found Serge boiling with indignation. "Do you know," he cried, "that Mr. Coombs has walked all the way from St. Michaels without pads in his boots, because those other fellows told him his feet would toughen quicker if he didn't use them? The consequence is they are simply raw from blisters, and every step he takes must be like treading on knives."

"It has been tedious at times," admitted Jalap Coombs. "And under the circumstances I don't know but what I'd ruther have one pair of feet than fourteen, or even half the number."

"Isn't it good to have old Jalap with us once more?" asked Phil of Serge, after they had turned in that night.

"Indeed it is; but do you notice how he has changed?"

"I should say I had. He is like a salt-water fish suddenly dropped into a fresh-water pond. He'll come out all right, though, especially if we can only get his feet into shape again."

That night the mercury fell to fifty-nine degrees below zero, and the next morning even Phil, impatient as he was to proceed, had not the heart to order men and dogs out into that bitter air before sunrise. With that, however, the mercury began slowly to rise, and when it had crept up nineteen degrees, or to only forty degrees below, the young leader declared the weather to be warm enough for anybody. So he ordered the sledges to be got ready, and when the one drawn by his own team came dashing up to the door, he announced that Mr. Coombs's fourteen pair of feet were at his service. He also politely requested the sailor-man to crawl into a big fur-lined bag with which the sledge was provided, and make himself comfortable.

"But, Phil," demurred the other, "I ain't no passenger to be tucked up in a steamer-cheer on deck. I'm shipped for this v'y'ge as one of the crew."

"Very well," replied Phil. "Then of course you will obey orders without a murmur, for I remember hearing you say, when we were aboard the *Seamew*, that even if a captain were to order his whole crew to knit bedquilts or tidies, they'd be bound to obey to the best of their ability."

“Sartain,” admitted the other. “I got that from old Kite Roberson, which bedquilts *and* tidies were his very words.” Then, without further remonstrance, the crippled sailor stepped to the sledge, slid feet first into the big bag, and lay there like an animated mummy, with the hood of his parka drawn close about his face. Its encircling fringe of long wolf-hair, added to his preternatural gravity of countenance, gave him such a comical expression that the boys could not help shouting with laughter as Kurilla cracked his great whip and the dogs sprang away with their new burden.

Phil took the lead, as usual, and when they reached the mouth of the Tanana, which, on account of its broad expanse, there was no chance of mistaking, he turned into it without hesitation, and in a few minutes they had taken their last view of the Yukon for many a long day.

At its mouth the Tanana is nearly three miles broad, or as wide as the Yukon itself, and is filled with islands, on which are stranded quantities of uprooted trees of greater size than any seen on the Yukon above that point.

The bitterness of the cold continued unabated, and the sledge party had hardly lost sight of the Yukon ere the young leader heard himself hailed from the rear, and paused to learn what was wanted.

“I say, Cap’n Phil,” began Jalap Coombs, with chattering teeth, “is it your orders or desire that your men should freeze to death?”

“Certainly not,” laughed the lad.

“Then, sir, I has the honor to report that this member of the crew is already froze solid half-way up, with ice making fast through the remainder of his system.”

“That is entirely contrary to orders,” replied Phil, sternly, “and must be stopped at once. So, sir, put your helm to port, and run for yonder timber.”

Half an hour later poor Jalap was being outwardly thawed by a roaring fire of great logs, and inwardly by cupful after cupful of scalding tea, which moved him to remark that, according to his friend Kite Roberson, tea and coffee were the next best things to observations of the sun for determining latitude.

CHAPTER XVIII

CHRISTMAS ON THE TANANA

“Look here,” said Phil, referring to the mate’s last surprising statement, “wasn’t your friend Mr. Rober-son in the habit of drawing the long bow?”

“No,” replied Jalap Coombs, in surprise at the question; “he couldn’t abide ’em.”

“Couldn’t abide what?”

“Bows, nor yet arrers, since when he were a kid some boys put up a game on him that they called William Tell, which allers did seem to me the foolish-est game, seeing that his name warn’t William, but Kite, and he warn’t expected to tell anything, only just to stand with a punkin on his head for them to shoot their bow-arrers at. Waal, the very fust one missed the punkin and plunked poor Kite in the stummick, after which he didn’t have no use for a long bow nor a short bow, nor yet a bow of any kind.”

“I don’t blame him,” laughed Serge. “But we would very much like to know how he determined latitude by tea and coffee.”

“Easy enough,” was the reply. “You see, tea is drunk mostly in cold latitoods similar tq this, and coffee in warm. The higher the latitood, the hotter and stronger the tea, and the less you hear of coffee. At forty-five or thereabouts they’s drunk about alike, while south of that coffee grows blacker and more common, while tea takes a back seat till you get to the line, where it’s mighty little used. Then as you

go south of that the same thing begins all over again ; but there's not many would notice sich things, and fewer as would put 'em to practical use like old Kite done."

"Mr. Coombs," said Phil, "you sound pretty well thawed out, and if that is the case we'll get under way again."

"Aye, aye, sir !" responded the mate, thrashing his long arms vigorously across his chest to restore circulation, and then slipping resignedly into his fur bag. "Anchor's apeak, sir." And away sped the sledges up the broad level of the Tanana.

Every member of the party had by this time become so thoroughly broken in to his duties that when they made camp that night the promptness with which it was prepared, as well as the ensuing comfort, was a revelation to Jalap Coombs, who declared that there had been nothing like it in the camps of the other party.

"Of course not," said Phil, "for they haven't got Serge Belcofsky along, so how could their comfort equal ours?"

At this Serge, covered with confusion, replied, "Nonsense, Phil ! You know it is because we have got such capital campmen as Kurilla and Chitsah with us."

At this the face of the elder Indian beamed with pleasure. He did not exactly understand the conversation ; but believing that he ought to make some reply, he pointed to Jalap Coombs, and, looking at Phil, remarked :

"You fadder. Yaas."

But the journey up the Tanana was by no means an unbroken record of swift movings from one comfortable camp to another, or of jokes and pleasantries. The days were now at their shortest, so that each could boast only about four hours of sunlight, and even that

was frequently obscured by fierce storms, when the howling winds cut like knives, and it required every ounce of Phil Ryder's pluck as well as Serge Belcofsky's dogged determination to keep the little party in motion. The feet of the poor dogs were often so pierced by ice slivers that their tracks were marked with blood. The older and more experienced would bite at these and pull them out. Others would howl with pain, while some would lie down and refuse to work until they were put in boots, which were little bags of deer-hide drawn over their feet and fastened with buckskin thongs.

It was a journey of constant and painful struggle and of dreary monotony, each day being only the same endless succession of ice-bound river, snow-covered hills, and sombre forest. Especially depressing was the night of the 24th of December, when, with an icy wind moaning through the tree-tops of the subarctic forest, and the shivering dogs edging towards the fire for a share of its grateful warmth, Phil and Serge and Jalap Coombs reminded each other that this was Christmas Eve. Never before had Phil spent one away from home, nor had the others ever been so utterly removed from the cheering influences of the joyous season. So Phil described what he knew was taking place in far-distant New London at that very hour, and Serge told of merry times in quaint old Sitka, while Jalap Coombs recalled many a noble plum-duff that had graced Christmas feasts far out at sea, until they all grew homesick, and finally crawled into their sleeping-bags to dream of scenes as remote from those surrounding them as could well be imagined.

As they always selected a camping-place and prepared for the long night by the last of the scanty daylight or in the middle of the afternoon, so they always resumed their journey by the moonlight or starlight,

or even in the darkness of two or three o'clock the next morning. On Christmas morning they started, as usual, many hours before daylight, and, either owing to the vagueness of all outlines, or because his thoughts were far away, the young leader mistook a branch for the main river, and headed for a portion of the mighty wilderness that no white man had ever yet explored.

About noon they passed a forlorn native village of three or four snow-covered huts, the occupants of which gazed at the unaccustomed sight of white travellers in stolid amazement. They had gone nearly a mile beyond this sole evidence of human occupation to be found in many a weary league when Phil suddenly stopped.

"Look here!" he exclaimed, "what do you two say to going back, making a camp near that village, and having some sort of a Christmas, after all? It doesn't seem right for white folks to let the day go by without celebrating it somehow."

As the others promptly agreed to this proposition the sledges were faced about, and a few minutes later the music of Musky's jingling bells again attracted the wondering natives from their burrows.

Camp was made on a wooded island opposite the village, and while the others were clearing the snow from a space some fifty feet square, and banking it up on the windward side, Phil took his gun and set forth to hunt for a Christmas dinner. An hour later he returned with four arctic hares and a brace of ptarmigan, or Yukon grouse, whose winter plumage was as spotless as the snow itself.

He found Serge and Jalap Coombs concocting a huge plum-duff, while from the brass kettle a savory steam was already-issuing. Kurilla and Chitsah had chopped a hole through four feet of ice and were fishing, while a few natives from the village hovered

about the outskirts of the camp, watching its strange life with curious interest. They were very shy, and moved away when Phil approached them, seeing which he called Kurilla and bade him tell them that a present would be given to every man, woman, and child who should visit the camp before sunset.

At first they could not comprehend this startling proposition, but after it had been repeated a few times the youngest of them, a mere boy, uttered a joyous shout and started on a run for the village. A few minutes later its entire population, not more than twenty-five in all, including babes in arms, or rather in the hoods of their mother's parkas, came hurrying over from the mainland filled with eager expectancy.

To every man Phil presented a small piece of tobacco, to every woman a handful of tea, and to every child a biscuit dipped in molasses. With each present he uttered, very distinctly, the word "Christmas." At length one child—though whether it were a boy or a girl he could not make out, for their fur garments were all exactly alike—looked up with a bashful smile and said "Kikmuk." In a minute all the others had caught the word, and the air rang with shouts of "Kikmuk," mingled with joyous laughter.

Then they all trooped back to the village, shouting "Kikmuk" as they went; and so long as they live the word will be associated in their minds with happiness and good-will. Three of them, a man and two women, afterwards returned, bringing with them a pair of dainty moccasins, a fox-skin, and an intestine filled with melted fat, which they timidly presented to Phil, Serge, and Jalap Coombs respectively. The last named regarded his gift rather dubiously, but accepted it with a hearty "Kikmuk," and remarked that it would probably be good for his feet, which it afterwards proved to be.

These three were invited to dine with Kurilla and



“KIKMUK”

Chitsah, an invitation which they accepted, and so became the guests of the Christmas dinner. On their side of the fire the feast consisted largely of the fish the Indians had just caught, to which were added unstinted tea and a liberal supply of the plum-duff. On the other side were mock-turtle soup *à la can*, baked fish, rabbit fricassee, roast grouse, plum-duff, hard bread, tea, and cocoa ; all of which combined to form what Phil pronounced to be the very best Christmas dinner he had ever eaten, in which sentiment Serge and Jalap Coombs heartily concurred.

Even the dogs were given cause to rejoice that Christmas had at length come to their snowy land by receiving a double ration of dried fish, which put them into such good spirits that they spent the greater part of the night in a rollicking game of romps.

On the Indian side of the fire the unwonted good cheer so overcame the shyness of the villagers that the man ventured to ask questions regarding the intentions and destination of this sledge party of strangers. When these were stated by Kurilla, he remained silent for a minute. Then he delivered a long and animated speech.

As a result of this, and when it was finished, Kurilla left his own side of the fire and, approaching Phil, said :

“ You go Forty Mile ? ”

“ Yes. We are going to Forty Mile, of course. ”

“ No like um Tanana ? ”

“ Certainly, I like the Tanana well enough. I shall like it better, though, when we have seen the last of it. ”

“ No can see um now. ”

“ Why not ? There it is right out yonder. ”

“ No. Him Kloot-la-ku-ka. Tanana so ” (pointing to the way they had come). “ You go so way ” (pointing

up-stream), "get lose; mebbe no fin'; plenty bad. Yaas!"

So, all on account of keeping Christmas and trying to bring a little of its joy into the hearts of those children of the wilderness, Phil's mistake was discovered before its consequences became disastrous, and he was once more enabled to place his little party on the right road to Sitka.

CHAPTER XIX

A BATTLE WITH WOLVES

THE remainder of the journey up the Tanana was uneventful, but so long that the new year was well begun ere the sledge party left it and turned up the Gheesah branch, which flows in from the east. An Indian guide, procured at the last village by the promise of a pound of tobacco for his services, accompanied them on their four days' journey up this river, and to the summit of the bleak, wind-swept divide, five hundred feet above timber-line. This gave the dogs a hard pull, though Jalap Coombs insisted upon lightening their load by walking; nor from this time on would he again consent to be treated as an invalid.

The summit once passed, they plunged rapidly down its farther side, and into the welcome shelter of timber fringing a tiny stream whose course they were now to follow. Their guide called it the Tukh-loo-ga-ne-lukh-nough, which, after vain attempts to remember, Phil shortened to "Tough Enough." Jalap Coombs, however, declared that this was not a "sarcumstance" to the names of certain down-East streams among which he was born, and to prove his assertion began to talk glibly of the Misquabenish, the Keejimkoopic, the Kashagawigamog, the Kahwahcambejewagamog, and others of like brevity, until Phil begged him to take a rest.

That night, while the camp was buried in the profound slumber that followed a day of unusually hard

work, and the fire had burned to a bed of coals, the single, long-drawn howl of a wolf was borne to it with startling distinctness by the night wind. As though it were a signal, it was answered from a dozen different directions at once. The alert dogs sprang from their snowy beds with bristling crests, and hurled back a challenge of fierce barkings; but this, being an incident of nightly occurrence, failed to arouse the tired sleepers.

Within a few minutes the dread howlings had so increased in volume that they seemed to issue from scores of savage throats, and to completely encircle the little camp. It was as if all the wolves of the forest, rendered desperate by famine, had combined for a raid on the supply of provisions so kindly placed within their reach. Nearer and nearer they came, until their dark forms could be seen like shadows of evil omen flitting among the trees and across the open moonlit spaces.

The dogs, at first eager to meet their mortal foes, now huddled together, terrified by overwhelming numbers. Still the occupants of the camp slept, unconscious of their danger. Suddenly there came a rush, an unearthly clamor of savage outcry, and the sleepers were roused to a fearful waking by a confused struggle within the very limits of the camp, and over their recumbent forms. They sprang up with yells of terror, and at the sound of human voices the invaders drew back, snapping and snarling with rage.

"Timber wolves!" shouted Serge. "Your rifle, Phil! Quick!"

Emboldened by this reinforcement, the dogs advanced to the edge of the camp space, but with low growls in place of their former defiant barkings.

Phil was trembling with excitement; but Serge, steady as a rock, was throwing the No. 4's from the

double-barrel and reloading with buckshot, at the same time calling to Chitsah to pile wood on the fire, and to the other Indians not to fire until all were ready. Jalap Coombs seized an axe, and, forgetful of the bitter cold, was rolling up his sleeves as though he purposed to fight the wolves single-handed. At the same time he denounced them as pirates and bloody land-sharks, and dared them to come within his reach.

“Are you ready?” cried Serge; “then fire!” And with a roar that woke the forest echoes for miles, the four guns poured their contents into the dense black mass that seemed just ready to hurl itself for a second time upon the camp.

With frightful howlings the pack scattered, and began to gallop swiftly in a wide circle about the fire-lit space. One huge brute, frenzied with rage, leaped directly towards the camp, with gleaming eyes and frothing mouth. Ere a gun could be levelled, Jalap Coombs stepped forward to meet him, and, with a mighty, swinging blow, his heavy axe crushed the skull of the on-coming beast as though it had been an egg-shell. Instantly the dogs were upon him, and tearing fiercely at their fallen enemy.

With the first shot Phil’s nervousness vanished, and as coolly as Serge himself he followed, with levelled rifle, the movements of the yelling pack in their swift circling. At each patch of moonlit space one or more of the fierce brutes fell before his unerring fire, until every shot of his magazine was exhausted.

“Now,” cried Serge, “we must scatter them. Every man take a firebrand in each hand, and all make a dash together.”

“Yelling,” added Jalap Coombs.

“Yes, yelling louder than the wolves themselves.”

The plan was no sooner proposed than adopted. Musky, Luvtuk, big Amook, and the rest, inspired by

their masters' courage, joined in the assault; and before that fire-bearing, yelling, on-rushing line of humanity and dogs the gaunt forest raiders gave way and fled in all directions.

The whole battle had not lasted more than five minutes, but it resulted in the death of nineteen wolves, six of which were despatched by the sailor man's terrible axe after the fight was over and they, more or less wounded, were slinking away towards places of hiding. But the dogs found them out, and they met a swift fate at the hands of Jalap Coombs.

As he finally re-entered the camp, dragging the last one behind him, he remarked, with a chuckle,

"Waal, boys, I ruther guess our boat's 'high line' this time, and I'm free to admit that this here wolf racket beats most kinds of fishing for genuine entertainment, onless it's fishing for sharks, which is exciting at times. I'm pleased to have met up with this school, though, for it's allers comforting to run across fresh proofs of my friend old Kite Roberson's knowin-ness. He useter say consarnin the critters, Kite did, that wolves was sharks and sharks was wolves, and that neither of 'em warn't no fit playthings for children; which it now seems to me he were correct, as usual."

"He certainly was," replied Phil, who, leaning on his rifle, was thoughtfully regarding the shaggy beast that Kite Roberson's friend had just dragged into camp. "But aren't these uncommonly big wolves? I never knew they grew so large."

"They don't generally," answered Serge; "but these are of the same breed as the great Siberian wolves, which, you know, are noted as being the largest and fiercest in the world."

"I don't wonder now that the dogs were frightened," continued Phil, "for this fellow looks twice as big as



"NOW," CRIED SERGE, "ALL MAKE A DASH TOGETHER!"

Amook, and he's no puppy. But I say, Serge, you're an awfully plucky chap. As for myself, I must confess I was so badly rattled that I don't believe I should have even thought of a gun before they were on us a second time."

"If they had made a second rush not one of us would be alive to talk about it now," remarked Serge, soberly; "and it was only the promptness of our attack that upset their plans. In dealing with wolves it is always safest to force the fighting; for, while they are awful bullies, they are cowards at heart, like all bullies I ever heard of."

"Captain Duff, for instance," said Phil, with a reminiscent smile. Then he added: "Anyhow, old man, you got us out of a bad scrape, for it isn't every fellow who would know just how to deal with a pack of wolves, especially when wakened from a sound sleep to find them piling on top of him."

"I don't believe it was quite as bad as that," objected Serge. "I expect only the dogs piled on top of us when they were driven in. By-the-way, did you know that four of them were killed, and several others pretty badly hurt?"

"No, I didn't," cried Phil, in dismay. "What ones are killed?"

"Two from my team, one from yours, and one from Chitsah's."

"Oh, the villains!" exclaimed the young leader. "Another victory like that would cripple us. Do you think there is any danger of them coming back?"

"Not just now; but I shouldn't be surprised to hear from them again to-morrow night."

"All right. I'm glad you mentioned it. Now we'll see if we can't have an interesting reception prepared for them."

"Pizen?" queried Jalap Coombs, who had lighted

his pipe and was now complacently watching the skinning of the dead wolves, which had been undertaken by the three Indians.

"Worse than that," answered Phil, significantly.

By the time the Indians had finished their task and breakfast had been eaten the usual starting-hour had arrived. Two of the wolf-skins were allotted to the guide, who was to leave them at this point, and he set forth on his return journey with them on his back. Rolled in them were the single dried salmon which would form his sole sustenance on the journey, and the cherished pound of tobacco, for which he had been willing to work so hard. In his hand he bore an old flintlock musket that was the pride of his heart, not so much on account of its shooting qualities, which were very uncertain, as by reason of its great length. It was the longest gun known to the dwellers of the Tanana Valley, and consequently the most valuable; for the Hudson Bay Company's method of selling such guns was to exchange one for as many marten, fox, or beaver skins as could be piled from stock to muzzle when it stood upright.

"I hope the wolves won't attack his camps," remarked Phil, as they watched the lonely figure pass out of sight on the back trail.

"Him no camp," declared Kurilla.

"But he must. Why, it's a four-days' journey to his home."

"No; one day, one night. Him no stop. Wolf no catch um. Yaas."

And Kurilla was right, for the Indian would push on over mile after mile of that frozen solitude without a pause, save for an occasional bite from his dried salmon, and a handful of snow to wash it down, until he reached his own far-away home.

CHAPTER XX

CHITSAN'S NATURAL TELEPHONE

SEVENTEEN green wolf-skins formed a heavy sledge-load, especially for the weakened dog-teams ; but fortunately Jalap Coombs's feet were again in condition for walking, and snow on the river was not yet deep. So it was determined to carry them—at least, for the present. On the evening following that of the encounter with the wolves, Phil, leaving the work of preparing camp to the others, unpacked the Eskimo wolf-traps of compressed whalebone that he had procured at Makagamoot. He had twenty of the ingenious little contrivances, and wrapped each one in a strip of frozen wolf-meat that he had saved and brought along for the purpose. When all were thus prepared, he carried them about a quarter of a mile from camp, and then dropped them at short intervals in a great circle about it. He knew the dogs would not stray that far since their experience of the night before, and so felt pretty certain that the traps would only find their way to the destination for which they were intended.

The first blood-chilling howl was heard soon after dark, and a few minutes later it was apparent that wolves were again gathering from all quarters. Then the anxious watchers caught occasional glimpses of dim forms, and sometimes of a pair of gleaming eyes, that invariably drew a shot from Phil's rifle. Still the wolves seemed to remember their lesson, or else they

waited for the occupants of the camp to fall asleep, for they made no effort at an attack.

As time passed the wolf tones began to change, and defiant howlings to give place to yelps and yells of distress. Soon other sounds were mingled with these—the fierce snarlings of savage beasts fighting over their prey. The traps were doing their work. Those wolves that had eagerly gulped them down were so stricken with deadly pains that they staggered, fell, and rolled in the snow. At the first symptoms of distress others sprang upon them and tore them in pieces, at the same time battling fiercely over their cannibal feast. So wolf fed wolf, while the night echoed with their hideous outcries, until finally the survivors, gorged with the flesh of their own kind, slunk away, and after some hours of bedlam quiet once more reigned in the forest.

So Phil's scheme proved a success, and for the remainder of that night he and his companions slept in peace. At daylight they visited the scenes of wolfish feasting, and found everywhere plentiful evidence of what had taken place; but this time they gathered in neither rugs nor robes, for only blood-stains, bones, and tattered shreds of fur remained.

Phil's only regret was that he had not a lot more of those same useful traps, though, as was afterwards proved, they were not needed, for never again during their journey did wolves appear in sufficient numbers to cause them any alarm.

For another week did the sledge party journey down the several streams that, emptying one into another, finally formed the Conehill River, or, as the gold-diggers call it, Forty Mile Creek, because its mouth is forty miles down the Yukon from the old trading-post of Fort Reliance. As the first half of their long journey drew towards a close they became anxious as to

its results and impatient for its end. When would they reach the settlement? and could they get there before their rivals who had followed the Yukon? were the two questions that they constantly asked of each other, but which none could answer.

Phil grew almost despondent as he reflected upon the length of time since they left old Fort Adams, and gave it as his opinion that the other party must have reached Forty Mile long since.

Serge also feared they had, though he didn't see how they could.

Jalap Coombs was firm in his belief that the other party was still far away, and that his would be the first in; for, quoth he, "Luck allers has been on my side, and I'm going to believe it allers will be. My old friend Kite Roberson useter say, speaking of luck, and he give it as his own experience, that them as struck the best kinds of luck was them as worked the hardest for it; and ef they didn't get it one way they was sure to another. Likewise he useter say, Kite did, consarning worriments, that ef ye didn't pay no attention to one 'twould be mighty apt to pass ye by; but ef ye encouraged it by so much as a wink or a nod, ye'd have to fight it to git red of it. So, seeing as they hain't no worriments hove in sight yet, what's the use in s'arching for 'em?"

As for Kurilla, whenever his opinion was asked, he always grinned and returned the same answer:

"You come pretty quick, mebbe. Yaas."

So each day of the last three or four brought its fresh hope; at each succeeding bend of the stream all eyes were strained eagerly forward for a sight of the expected cluster of log-huts, and each night brought an added disappointment.

At length one evening, when Phil, who had pushed on longer than usual, in an effort to end their suspense,

was reluctantly compelled, by gathering darkness, to go into camp, Chitsah suddenly attracted attention to himself by running to a tree and pressing an ear to its trunk. As the others stared at him, a broad smile overspread his face, and he said something to his father, which the latter instantly interpreted.

"What?" cried Phil, incredulously. "He thinks he hears the sound of chopping?"

"Yaas," answered Kurilla. "Axe, chop um, white men, plenty. Yaas."

"I, too, can hear something!" exclaimed Serge, who had imitated Chitsah's movements, "though I wouldn't swear it was chopping."

"Hurrah! So can I!" shouted Phil, after a moment of intent listening at another tree. "First time, though, I ever knew that the public telephone service was extended to this country. The sound I heard might be a train of cars twenty miles away, or a woodpecker somewhere within sight. No matter. If Chitsah says it's chopping, it must be, for he ought to know, seeing that he first heard it with the aid of the tree-telephone. So let's go for it. We can afford to travel an hour or two in the dark for the sake of meeting the white man who is swinging that axe, can't we?"

"Of course we can," replied Serge.

"Aye, aye, sir!" answered Jalap Coombs.

"Mebbe catch um. Yaas," added Kurilla, sharing the general enthusiasm.

Even the tired dogs barked, pricked up their sharp ears, sniffed the air, and did not, seemingly, object to moving on.

So the long teams were again swung into line, the pistol-like reports of the three sledge-whips rang sharply through the keen air, and the whole party swept on down the darkening river at a greater speed than they had made that day.

An hour later, as they rounded a projecting point, Phil uttered an exulting shout. A cluster of twinkling lights shone dead ahead, and our travellers knew that their goal was won.

"Let's give them a volley," suggested Serge. "It's the custom of the country, you know."

So the guns were taken from their deerskin coverings, and at Phil's word of command a roar from double-barrel, flintlock, and Winchester woke glad echoes from both sides of the broad valley and from the rugged Yukon cliffs beyond. Then, with whoopings and cheers and frantic yelpings of dogs, the sledge brigade dashed on towards the welcoming lights.

"Hello the camp!" yelled Phil, as they approached the dark cluster of cabins.

"On deck!" roared Jalap Coombs, as though he were hailing a ship at sea.

"Hello yourself!" answered a gruff voice—the first hail in their own tongue that the boys had heard in many a week. "Who are you? Where do you come from? And what's all this racket about?"

"White men," replied Phil, "with dog-sledges, up from Yukon mouth."

"Great Scott! You don't say so! No wonder you're noisy! Hi, boys! Here's the first winter outfit that ever came from Yukon mouth to Forty Mile. What's the matter with giving them a salute?"

"Nothing at all!" cried a score of voices, and then volley after volley rang forth, until it seemed as though every man there must have carried a loaded gun and emptied it of all six shots in honor of the occasion.

Men came running from all directions, and before the shooting ceased the entire population of the camp, some three hundred in number, were eagerly crowding about the new-comers, plying them with questions,

and struggling for the honor of shaking hands with the first arrivals of the year.

"Are we really the first to come up the river?" asked Phil.

"To be sure you are. Not only that, but the first to reach the diggings from any direction since navigation closed. But how did you come? Not by the river, I know, for when I heard your shooting 'twas clear away up the creek."

"We came by the Tanana and across the Divide," answered Phil. "There is another party coming by way of the river, though, and we were afraid they might get in ahead of us."

"Hark to that, boys! One train just arrived, and another coming! I tell you, old Forty Mile is right in it. Daily express from all points, through tickets to Europe, Arup, and Arrap; morning papers and opera-houses, circus and theatres. Looks like the boom had struck us at last. But say, stranger, what is the news from below?"

"New steamer on her way up the river, with saw-mill, mining machinery, and best stock of goods ever seen in Alaska," replied Phil, quick to seize the opportunity, and anxious to make his business known while he still had the field to himself. "We have come from her, and are on our way to San Francisco to send up a new stock for next season. So we have only stopped to take your orders and find out what will be the most acceptable."

"Hurrah!" yelled the crowd, wild with excitement. "Send us a brass-band," shouted one. "In swaller-tails and white kids," added another. "What's the matter with moving the Palace Hotel up here?" suggested a third, "seeing as San Francisco isn't in it any longer with Forty Mile. Especially send along the café."

“Come, fellows, let up,” cried the man who had been the first to welcome the new arrivals, and whose name was Riley. “We mustn’t keep these gentlemen standing out here in the cold any longer. I reckon they’re hungry, too, and wondering why we don’t invite ’em to grub. So, men, just come into my shebang and make yourselves at home. There isn’t much to it, but such as it is it’s yours, so long as you’ll honor yours truly.”

“No, come with me,” cried another voice. “I’ve got beans, Boston baked, fresh from the can.” “I’ve got molasses and soft-tack,” and “I’ve just made a dish of scouse,” “Come with us,” shouted others.

“No, you don’t !” roared Mr. Riley. “They’re my meat, and they are going to bunk in with me. But, boys, you can send along your beans and your dope and your scouse, and whatever else comes handy, for I’ve only got roast beef and chicken-salad and a few terrapin, and we want to do this thing up in style. So, ‘all small contributions thankfully received’ is the word, and if we don’t scare up just the niftiest spread on the coast this night then my name isn’t Platt Riley, that’s all.”

CHAPTER XXI

A YUKON MINING CAMP

THE supper provided by the hospitable miners was a good one, and heartily did our travellers enjoy it; but while they are appeasing the extraordinary appetites that they acquired somewhere in the Alaskan wilderness, let us take a look at this most northern of American mining camps.

To begin with, although it is at the junction of Forty Mile Creek and the Yukon River, it is not in Alaska, but about twenty miles east of the boundary in Northwest Territory, which is one of the subdivisions of Canada. The most recent name of this camp is "Mitchell," but all old Yukon miners know it as Camp Forty Mile. At the time of Phil Ryder's visit it contained nearly two hundred log-cabins, two stores, including the one that he established in the name of his friend Gerald Hamer, two saloons, both of which were closed for the season, and a small cigar factory. Although the winter population was only about three hundred, in summer-time it is much larger, as many of the miners come out in the fall and return before the 15th of June, at which date, according to Yukon mining law, every man owning a claim must be on the ground, or it may be "jumped."

Forty Mile is what is known as a placer camp, which means that its gold is found in minute particles or "dust" in soft earth, from which it can be washed in sluices or rockers. Into one of these a stream of water

is turned that sweeps away all the dirt and gravel, allowing the heavier gold to sink to the bottom, where it is caught and held by cross-bars or "riffles."

Although gold has been discovered at many points along the Yukon and its branches, the deposit at Forty Mile is the richest yet worked, and has paid as high as three hundred dollars to a man for a single day's labor. Twelve thousand dollars' worth of gold was cleared by one miner in a three months' season, and a five-hundred-dollar nugget has been found; but most of the miners are content if they can make "ounce wages," or sixteen dollars per day, while the average for the camp is not over eight dollars per day during the short season of that arctic region.

Sluices can only be worked during three or four months of summer-time; then come the terrible eight or nine months of winter when the mercury thinks nothing of dropping to sixty or seventy degrees below zero, and the whole world seems made of ice. Strange as it may appear, the summer weather of this region is very hot, eighty-five degrees in the shade and one hundred and twelve degrees in the sun being frequently reached by the mercury. During the summer months, too, the entire Yukon Valley is as terribly infested with mosquitoes as is any mangrove swamp of the tropics. Thus the hardy miner who penetrates it in his search for gold is made to suffer from one cause or another during every month of the year.

In spite of the summer heat the ground never thaws to a depth of more than five or six feet, below which it is solidly frozen beyond any point yet reached by digging. Under the dense covering of moss, six to eighteen inches thick, by which the greater part of Alaska is overspread, it does not thaw more than a few inches. Consequently the most important item of a Yukon miner's winter work is the stripping of this

moss from his claim in order that next summer's sun may have a chance to thaw it to working depth.

There were no women nor children at Forty Mile, and there were very few amusements, but there is plenty of hard work in both summer, when the sun hardly sets at all, and in the winter, when he barely shows his face above the southern horizon. Besides the laborious task of moss-stripping, the miner must saw out by hand all lumber for sluices and rockers. He must build his own cabin and fashion its rude furniture, besides doing all of his own house-work and cooking. He also expects to do a certain amount of hunting and trapping during the winter months, so that his time, unless he be very lazy, is fully occupied. But lazy men are not apt to reach Forty Mile, for the journey from Juneau, in southern Alaska, which is the largest city in the Territory, as well as the nearest outfitting point for the diggings, is so filled with peril and the roughest kind of hard work as to deter any but men of the most determined energy.

At Juneau, Yukon travellers provide themselves with an outfit of snow-shoes, sledges, tents, fur clothing, provisions, and whatever else seems to them necessary. Starting in the early spring, they proceed by boat to the Chilkat country, seventy miles distant, and to the head of Chilkoot Inlet. From there they set forth on a terrible mountain climb over snow many feet in depth, where they are in constant danger from avalanches, and cross the coast range by a pass that rises three thousand feet above timber-line. On the opposite side they strike the head-waters of the Yukon, which they follow through a series of six lakes, sledging over their still ice-bound waters, and rafting down their connecting links, in which are seething rapids, dark gorges, and roaring cañons, around which all goods must be carried on men's backs. After some

two hundred miles of these difficulties have been passed, trees must be felled, lumber sawed out, and boats constructed for the remaining five hundred miles of the weary journey.

As it would not pay to transport freight by this route, all provisions and other supplies for the diggings are shipped from San Francisco by sea to St. Michaels, where they are transferred to small river steamers like the *Chimo*, and so, after being many months on the way, finally reach their destination. By this time their value has become so enhanced or "enchanted," as the miners say, that Phil Ryder found flour selling for \$30 per barrel, bacon at 35 cents per pound, beans at 25 cents per pound, canned fruit at 60 cents per pound, coarse flannel shirts at \$8 each, rubber boots at \$18 per pair, and all other goods at proportionate rates. Even sledge dogs, such as he had purchased at Anvik for \$5 or \$6 each, were here valued at \$25 apiece.

In view of these facts it is no wonder that the news of another steamer on the river bringing a saw-mill to supply them with lumber, machinery with which to work the frozen but gold-laden earth of their claims, and a large stock of goods to be sold at about one-half the prevailing prices, created a very pleasant excitement among the miners of that wide-awake camp.

On the day following his arrival, and after a careful survey of the situation, Phil rented the largest building in the place, paying one month's rent in advance, and giving its owner an order on Gerald Hamer for the balance until the time of the *Chimo's* arrival. This building had been used as a saloon, and was conveniently located close by the steamboat-landing facing the river. Into it the sledge party moved all their belongings, including the seventeen wolf-skins, which now formed rugs for their floor as well as coverings for sev-

eral split-log benches. Serge and the two Indians at once started up the river with the sledges for a supply of firewood, which was a precious article in Forty Mile at that time, leaving Phil and Jalap Coombs to clean the new quarters and render them habitable. While the latter, with a sailor's neat deftness, attended to this work, Phil busied himself with a pot of black paint and a long breadth of cotton cloth. At this he labored with such diligence that in an hour's time a huge sign appeared above the entrance to the building and stretched across its entire front. On it, in letters so large that they could be plainly read from the river, was painted the legend, "Yukon Trading Company, Gerald Hamer, Agent."

This promise of increased business facilities was greeted by a round of hearty cheers from a group of miners who had assembled to witness the raising of the new sign, and when Jalap Coombs finished tacking up his end one of these stepped up to him with a keen scrutiny. Finally he said, "Stranger, may I be so bold as to ask who was the best friend you ever had?"

"Sartain you may," replied the sailor-man, "seeing as I'm allers proud to mention the name of old Kite Roberson, and likewise claim him for a friend."

"I thought so!" cried the delighted miner, thrusting out a great hairy paw. "I thought I couldn't be mistook in that figger-head, and I knowed if you was the same old Jalap I took ye to be that Kite Roberson wouldn't be fur off. Why, matey, don't you remember the old brig *Betsy*? Have you clean forgot Skiff Bettens?"

"Him that went into the hold and found the fire and put it out, and was drug up so nigh dead from smoke that he didn't breathe nateral agin fur a week? Not much I hain't forgot him, and I'm nigh about as

"WHY, MATEY, DON'T YOU REMEMBER THE OLD BRIG 'BETSY'?"



glad to see him as if he were old Kite himself!" exclaimed Jalap Coombs, in joyous tones. Then he introduced Mr. Skiff Bettens, ex-sailor and now Yukon miner, to Phil, and pulled him into the house, and there was no more work to be got out of Jalap Coombs that day.

Phil had also been recognized. That is, Mr. Platt Riley had asked him if he were the son of his father, and when Phil admitted the relationship, told him that he had a father to be proud of every minute of his life. Didn't he know? for hadn't he, Platt Riley, worked side by side with Mr. John Ryder prospecting in South Africa, where every ounce of grit that a white man had in him was bound to show itself? "To be certain he had," and now he was proud to shake the hand of John Ryder's son, and if there was anything John Ryder's son wanted in that camp, why he, Platt Riley, was the man to get it for him.

So our sledge travellers found that even in that remote mining camp, buried from the world beneath the snows of an arctic winter, they were among friends. This, coupled with all that they had undergone in reaching it, made it seem to them a very pleasant and comfortable place in which to rest awhile.

And it was necessary that they should stay there for a time. They must cultivate friendly business relations with the miners on Gerald Hamer's account, and find out what class of goods were most in demand; for never until now had Phil realized the responsibility with which he had been intrusted. He must prepare a full report to send back by Kurilla and Chitsah, who could not be tempted to venture any farther away from their homes. The dogs must be well rested before they would be fitted for the second and most difficult half of the long journey. Above all, Phil felt that, as representative of the Yukon Trading Com-

pany, he must be on hand to meet the agents of its old-established rival, and defend his far-away friend from the false reports they were certain to spread concerning him.

He wondered why Goldollar and Strengel did not appear, and dreaded to meet them, but at the same time longed to have the disagreeable encounter over with as quickly as possible. So, many times each day did he gaze long and fixedly across the broad white plain of the Yukon. At length, on the eighth day after their arrival at Forty Mile, his eye was caught by some moving black dots that he felt certain must be the expected sledges.

CHAPTER XXII

THE NEW ARRIVAL AT FORTY MILE

THE man known as Strengel was probably as great a rascal as could be found in all Alaska. His sole object in shipping aboard the steamer *Norsk* at San Francisco had been to make his way, by fair means or foul, to the Yukon gold-fields, of which he had gained extravagant ideas. On the night before the *Norsk* left St. Michaels he stole from the chests of several of his shipmates such small sums of money as they contained, slipped into a canoe, and deserted the ship. He remained in hiding until she sailed, and then, claiming to have been discharged at his own request, offered his services to Gerald Hamer in exchange for a passage to Forty Mile. This proposition being accepted, and Strengel regularly shipped as one of the *Chimo's* crew, he made a secret proposal to the old company through one of its clerks, who happened to be Simon Goldollar, to so delay and cripple Gerald Hamer's expedition that he should be forced to abandon it. In attempting to carry out this programme he was foiled by Phil Ryder's quick wit and prompt action.

Making his way back to St. Michaels, after Phil set him ashore at the Pastolik wood-yard, Strengel fell in with Jalap Coombs, and, in company with Goldollar, so managed the money affairs of that unsuspecting sailor that he was unwittingly made to defray all their expenses to Forty Mile, though he only expected to accompany them a short distance up the river. Stren-

gel's sole object was still to reach the gold-fields, while Goldollar was intent on winning a reputation for himself by forestalling Gerald Hamer at Forty Mile, and at the same time inflicting what injury he could on Phil Ryder. From the outset they agreed to rid themselves of Jalap Coombs at some point so far up the river that he must necessarily remain where they left him for the rest of the winter. They learned at Nulato that the *Chimo* was frozen in at Anvik, but took care that this information should not reach Jalap Coombs, whom they soon afterwards so cruelly deserted.

As they travelled beyond the point where they left him, the well-mated pair had such frequent and bitter quarrels that, when Simon Goldollar fell seriously ill, Strengel did not hesitate to rob him of what money he carried and desert him at a native village near the abandoned trading-post of Fort Yukon. Before doing this he discharged the Indians who had come with them from Nulato, and sent them back, telling them that he should remain with his sick friend until he recovered or died. As soon as they were gone he engaged other natives, and set out for the diggings that had for so long been the goal of his desires.

He planned to enter Forty Mile under a new name, and as a traveller from one of the interior Hudson Bay trading-posts, who was ignorant of the lower Yukon, its people, and its happenings. He was confident that Jalap Coombs would never appear to contradict him, and almost equally certain that Simon Goldollar would never reach Forty Mile. If by a miracle he should recover from his illness, he was helpless to continue his journey before the boats came up in the summer, by which time the man who had robbed and deserted him would be lost to sight amid the season's rush of prospectors. In the meantime he had plenty

of money to live on until he should meet with an opportunity for making a strike of some kind.

Thus it was that on a pleasant day of late January Mr. Strengel approached the mining camp of Forty Mile, riding comfortably in Jalap Coombs's own sledge, with a light heart and no intimation of aught but an agreeable reception by its citizens. But in all his carefully-worked-out plans he had made several miscalculations.

It had never occurred to him that there was any other route than the one he had followed by which this point might be reached from the lower river. Nor did he believe it possible that any word of Gerald Hamer's expedition could have come up the river unknown to him. Finally, his gravest mistake lay in supposing the population of this camp to be of the same lawless class as is to be found in most Western mining camps, and believing that here he should meet only with as great rascals as himself. In this he displayed great ignorance of Forty Mile, which was wholly in the hands of honorable old-time miners, who had framed a simple set of laws for the regulation of their isolated little community that they were determined should be respected. They had chosen one of their own number as judge, and from his decisions they allowed no appeal. They had also elected a marshal, whom they loyally assisted in the discharge of his duties. Several lawless characters had already been driven from the camp, and many others warned not to venture within its limits.

As Forty Mile had received warning of the expected coming of Goldollar and Strengel, and had learned many interesting things concerning the previous history of these gentlemen, their arrival was eagerly anticipated. Thus, upon Phil Ryder's announcement that sledges were coming up the river, an expectant throng was quickly gathered at the landing.

Mr. Strengel fired several shots from his rifle as he drew near, and was surprised that his salute was not answered in kind. He was, of course, gratified to observe the sensation that his approach was creating, and undertook to arouse some enthusiasm among the silent spectators by yelling, "Hurrah for Forty Mile! Hurrah for the diggings! Hurrah for our side!" Then, as his sledge reached the bank and he sprang out, he cried, in tones meant to convey hearty good-fellowship:

"How are you, boys? You bet I'm mighty glad to see white men again after camping with a lot of low-lived Injuns for more than two months. You see, I've just come down from Pierre's House on the Porcupine. My name's Bradwick, and—"

Here the speaker's fluent words seemed suddenly to fail him, his face turned pale, and his eyes were fixed in a bewildered stare. He had caught sight of the Yukon Trading Company's sign.

"Ha, ha!" he laughed, recovering himself with an effort. "Seeing the name of an old friend who's long since dead kinder give me a turn. But, as I was saying—"

"Yes, you were just about to tell us what had become of Goldollar," interrupted Mr. Platt Riley, who had received word from Phil that the new-comer was Strengel.

"Goldollar!" stammered the stranger, at the same time starting as though he had been shot. "Goldollar!" he repeated, reflectively; "I don't know the name; never heard it before in my life. I think I mentioned that I'd just come down from Pierre's House on the Porcupine, and hadn't seen a white man since leaving there. There wasn't no one of that name at Pierre's House when I left. What do you mean? Who is Goldollar, anyhow?"

"He's a feller that we heard was coming up from be-

low with a dog train," replied Mr. Riley, deliberately, at the same time gazing full in Strengel's face. "And we didn't know but what you and him might have met up and concluded to travel together."

"How could you hear of him?" inquired the newcomer. "I didn't know there was any way for news to reach Forty Mile in the winter."

"Oh, we might have heard by mail, or telegraph, or seen it in the daily papers, or a dozen other ways. Anyhow, we did hear it, and that another feller was along with him. So of course when we saw you coming up the river—"

"You didn't hear that the other fellow's name was Bradwick, did you?" interrupted the stranger.

"No, that wasn't the name. It wasn't so good a name as that."

"Well, then, you didn't hear that I was coming with him; for Bradwick's my name, and I don't know nothing about any Goldollars, though I hope to find out something about them right here in these diggings," replied Mr. Strengel, boldly, and with attempted jocularity. "Now, seeing that I'm tired, and cold, and hungry," he added, "supposing we adjourn to some place that's warmer than out here in the snow, and better suited for making acquaintances."

"All right," replied Mr. Platt Riley, who, possessed of a keen sense of humor, was disposed to prolong the farce that promised so much entertainment. "We don't know much about Goldollars ourselves, but we'll try and teach you all we do know, and at the same time put you in the way of meeting acquaintances. As you say, though, this is a cold place for talking, so I suppose you might as well come up to my select family boarding-house for the night, seeing as it ain't overcrowded just at present. Then in the morning we'll look round for a place that'll suit you better."

So the new-comer walked away with Mr. Platt Riley, while the spectators of this interesting meeting chuckled and winked significantly, poked each other in the ribs, and remarked :

“Ain’t the jedge a honey-cooler, though? He ain’t the kind that’ll hang a man first and try him afterwards. Not much; that ain’t his style. Fair play’s his motter, and turn the rascals out every time.”

It is needless to say that during the interview just described Phil, Serge, and Jalap kept themselves out of sight; nor had any one let fall an intimation of their presence in the camp.

All that evening a constant stream of visitors flowed in and out of Mr. Platt Riley’s cabin. Each wore an expression of expectancy and suppressed mirth, and each bowed gravely, without trusting himself to speak, when introduced to Mr. “Bradwick.” It was also to be noticed that none of them shook hands with him. When he complained of this to his host he was gravely informed that hand-shaking was not one of the customs of the camp. All the visitors listened with great interest to his glib talk of the Porcupine and of other regions to the eastward, while some even went so far as to express regret that he had not met their friend Goldollar.

He always turned the conversation at this point; nor did he again refer to the name of his dead friend that had confronted him on the sign of the Yukon Trading Company. At the same time it caused him a great deal of uneasiness, and led him to think seriously of shortening his stay in the camp to a single night.

When he, in turn, inquired about the prospects of the diggings, and learned that most claims had to be stripped of frozen moss and thawed out before they could be worked, he declared that he’d see the whole country and its gold in Jericho before he’d strip moss,

which he denounced as work only fit for "Injuns" and convicts.

On the whole, his impressions of Camp Forty Mile were so unpleasant that he fully determined to get his dog teams in motion the very next day, and push on farther up the river. It was only upon the urgent request of Mr. Platt Riley that he consented to delay his departure long enough to attend a public meeting of the greatest interest to all Yukon miners, that was to be held the first thing in the morning.

CHAPTER XXIII

LAW IN THE GOLD DIGGINGS

THE latest comer to Camp Forty Mile was not particularly anxious to attend the public meeting to which he was invited by Mr. Platt Riley. Still he thought it better to do so rather than run the risk of offending his host, who was evidently a man of influence in the diggings. His overnight reflections having convinced him that this camp was not such a place as he had expected, and also that he might find greater safety elsewhere, his first act in the morning was to order his Indian drivers to harness the dogs and be prepared for a start within an hour.

Kurilla, who was with them under instructions not to lose sight of them, grinned when he heard this, for he had picked up an inkling of what was going on, and felt pretty certain that the order need not be obeyed.

When Mr. Riley's reluctant guest entered the store of the Yukon Trading Company, in which, on account of its size, the meeting was to be held, he fully intended to take a back seat and slip out as soon as he could do so unnoticed. The place was so filled with miners, however, that there were no back seats, and, to his surprise, the crowd pressed aside as he and Mr. Riley entered, so as to leave a passage to the farther end of the room. A moment later, without knowing just how it had been done, he found himself seated beside Jalap Coombs's friend, Skiff Bettens, who obligingly made a

place for him. He noticed, with some curiosity, that twelve men were seated on benches directly opposite to him, while all the rest of the crowd were standing. Between him and these men was an open space, at the upper end of which were a table and a chair raised on a rude platform.

To this platform Mr. Platt Riley made his way, and seating himself in the chair, rapped on the table for silence. Then rising, he said :

“Gentlemen of the jury and fellow-citizens,—This court is now open for business, and I as its judge, elected by your votes, am prepared to administer justice in accordance with your laws and such verdicts as may be rendered by your jury.”

“It is a court,” thought Strengel, with a shiver.

“The case to be tried this morning,” continued the judge, “is one that touches the pocket, the life, and the honor of every miner in the Yukon Valley, for the prisoner at the bar is indicted on three separate counts as a thief, a murderer, and an unmitigated scoundrel. He has come into our camp under a false name and with a false story, after having attempted the destruction of a steamer that is bringing goods and machinery of which we are greatly in need.

“He is charged with robbing and leaving helpless in the wilderness a man whom we all know and respect, and also with robbing and deserting while seriously ill his own companion, who was on his way to visit us in behalf of our old-established trading company.”

Strengel listened to these terrible words with an ever-increasing paleness and visible agitation. Finally, clapping a hand to his face, as though seized with a sudden illness, he started to rise and leave the room.

“Sit down,” ordered Skiff Bettens in a low tone, at the same time jerking him back to his seat. Then the man knew that he was indeed a prisoner.

“To prove these serious charges,” continued the judge, “I am about to call several witnesses. At the same time the prisoner will be given the privilege of cross-questioning them, and of pleading in his own behalf. Mr. Philip Ryder.”

At this summons Phil advanced from the farther end of the room, and the prisoner regarded him with undisguised amazement.

After answering the usual questions regarding his personality and business, Phil was asked if he knew the prisoner.

“I do,” he answered.

“What is his name?”

“I understand that he now calls himself Bradwick, but a few months ago he went by the name of Stren-gel.”

“That’s a lie!” shouted the prisoner, hoarsely.

“Silence!” commanded the judge. “Now Mr. Ryder, tell the jury what you know concerning the accused from the time of your first meeting with him up to the present.”

This Phil did as briefly as possible, and when he had finished the prisoner sprang to his feet, his face black with rage, and exclaimed: “Why should this fellow’s story be believed rather than mine? Who knows anything about him, or even who he is? He was picked up in Bering Sea, drifting about in a stolen canoe. At St. Michaels he was known as a thief and a brawler. I happen to know that he has been locked up in a Victoria police-station, and I demand that his evidence be thrown out.”

“That will do, sir,” said the judge. “I happen to know this young man and his family so well that I am willing to vouch for him if necessary. Do you wish to question him? No? Then we will proceed. Mr. Serge Belcofsky.”

"THAT'S A LIE!" SHOUTED THE PRISONER, HOARSELY

W. A. Rogers.





Serge, of course, identified the prisoner as Strengel, and corroborated Phil's story in every detail.

"This ends the testimony on the first charge," announced the judge when Serge had finished, and the prisoner sullenly declined to question him. "In proof of the second charge, that of robbery and desertion, I call as witness Mr. Jalap Coombs."

As the ex-mate of the *Seamew* advanced to the stand the prisoner stared at him as though he were a ghost, nor could he imagine by what miracle this witness had reached Forty Mile in time to appear against him.

Jalap Coombs told his story in his own picturesque language, but in a perfectly straightforward manner, and without the slightest hesitation.

When he finished, the judge questioned him very closely as to the amount of money given him by Mr. John Ryder, and the prices paid for various articles of his outfit at St. Michaels.

As a defence against this charge the prisoner claimed that Jalap Coombs had not been deserted by Simon Goldollar and himself, but had voluntarily turned back, and that the dogs they had left with him had run away to follow them much against their wishes. He also stated that they had taken the dogs and sledge back to the place where they last saw Jalap Coombs, but that they could not find him.

"They were not his dogs, anyway, judge," he continued, "nor did he furnish any of our outfit except a few provisions, most of which he traded to the Indians on his own account. This man Coombs was a sailor, supposed to be a deserter from some ship, and was loafing around St. Michaels half starved when we picked him up. He claimed to have some friends on the river who would help him, and so we brought him along out of charity."

“May I toot a horn, jedge?” asked Mr. Skiff Bettens, rising as the prisoner concluded his remarks.

“Certainly you may, marshal.”

“Waal, I only wanted to say that I’ve knowed Mr. Jalap Coombs off and on for a good many years, and in all that time I’ve never knowed him to tell a lie nor yet do a mean thing. Moreover, I’m willing to stake my pile on his honesty agin that of any living man, for a better sailor, a squarer man, and a truer friend never trod a deck.”

This sincere tribute so affected the simple-hearted sailor-man that he could only stare open-mouthed at the speaker, as though he were talking in some mysterious language, though in after-years he often referred to this as the proudest moment of his life. The remainder of the audience greeted the marshal’s little speech with an outburst of applause, which the judge was finally obliged to check.

“Letting charge number two rest with the testimony taken,” said the judge, when quiet was restored, “we will take up charge number three, which is the most serious of all. We have already learned that the accused, under the name of Strengel, passed old Fort Adams about a month ago, bound for this place in company with a man named Goldollar, who appears to be a pretty tough character himself, though that of course has nothing to do with this case. The accused at that time had little or nothing of his own, either in the way of money or outfit, while Goldollar appears to have been well fixed with both. Now this man turns up in this place alone under the name of Bradwick, telling a story about having come from up the Porcupine that he has since admitted to be false, and in possession of the outfit formerly owned by Mr. Coombs and Simon Goldollar. Of course, under the circumstances, the question naturally to be asked is, what has become of Goldollar?”

"He got sick of the trip and turned back from Yukon," explained the prisoner, sulkily.

"Yes, we've heard he took sick," replied the judge; "but whether he turned back or was left to die in an Indian rancheria is another question. Mr. Coombs, will you please take the stand again?"

This time Jalap Coombs testified that he had carefully examined the outfit brought into camp the night before by the prisoner, and found it to contain the same number of sledges, the same number of dogs, and the identical articles, with the exception of a certain quantity of provisions, that had composed it at old Fort Adams.

"We will now call on one other witness," announced the judge, and the prisoner started as though he expected to see Simon Goldollar himself appear on the stand. What he did see was one of his own native drivers from Fort Yukon, with Kurilla to act as interpreter.

"Do you admit Injun testimony in this court?" he asked, disgustedly.

"Certainly we do," replied the judge.

"If I'd known that," he muttered, "I'd have bought a dozen or so to testify on my side."

The Indian's testimony was to the effect that this white man had left another white man in a native hut at Fort Yukon so sick that all the Indians thought he would die.

"Of course I can't buck agin Injun testimony," growled the prisoner; "but I say it's a lie, all the same, and don't prove nothing."

"There is one thing that we must not neglect," said the judge. "Marshall, you may search the prisoner."

The latter struggled furiously, but was overpowered and held by strong hands while the marshall searched his pockets. From these were produced a number of

articles, including a wallet, which the judge opened, spreading its contents on the table before him.

“Do you recognize anything here?” he asked of Jalap Coombs.

“I can identify this as having been in Goldollar’s possession,” answered the mate, picking up one of the articles that had dropped from the wallet, and holding it so that all might see.

Both Phil and Serge uttered exclamations of amazement, for the object thus exhibited was nothing more nor less than the mysteriously carved and almost forgotten fur-seal’s tooth that had already exerted so great an influence upon their fortunes.

CHAPTER XXIV

REAPPEARANCE OF THE FUR-SEAL'S TOOTH

“WHAT do you know about this thing?” asked the judge of Jalap Coombs, taking the fur-seal's tooth from him and examining it curiously.

“I know that there were an old Eskimo at St. Michaels what were shipped by Goldollar to go with us to Nulato as dog-driver. He wore this bit of ivory hung about his neck, and seemed to set a heap by it. One time when he were looking at it I heerd Goldollar say that by rights it belonged to him, seeing as he got it from some natyve, and it were afterwards stole from him. He didn't say nothing to the Husky about it, but when we got to Nulato he give him so much liquor that in the morning the old chap couldn't be woke up. Goldollar fooled round him a while, and then saying he'd have to give up the job of waking him, left him, and ordered the teams to pull out. I afterwards seen Goldollar take that very identical tooth outen his pocket several times and look at it like it were a diamond or some sich, and heerd him tell Strengel that any man as owned it would surely have luck. It didn't seem to bring him none, though. Leastways no good luck, for he hain't had nothing but bad luck sence.”

“Was it your impression that you could win good luck by stealing this tooth?” inquired the judge of Strengel.

“I didn't steal it,” answered the prisoner, sullenly.
“How did you get it, then?”

"Goldollar give it to me."

"Where did you leave Goldollar?"

"At Fort Yukon."

"Was he in good health when you last saw him?"

"I refuse to answer any more questions," replied the prisoner, suddenly realizing how deeply he was committing himself.

"Very well," said the judge. "I think you have already told enough to give us a pretty fair idea of the particular kind of a scoundrel you are. So, if you have nothing more to say, I declare this case closed and in the hands of the jury. Gentlemen, the court awaits your verdict."

As there was no room to which the jury could retire, they put their heads together and consulted in whispers, during which time Phil told the judge what he knew about the fur-seal's tooth, together with the legend of good and bad luck supposed to accompany its possession. The spectators of the trial buzzed like a swarm of angry hornets, and cast wrathful glances at the prisoner who had just been proved so worthy of their contempt.

In a few minutes the jury ended their conference and resumed their places. Then, as order was restored, the foreman, standing up, announced that they were unanimous in finding the prisoner guilty on all three of the charges preferred against him, and recommended that he be so punished as to afford a warning to others of his kind who might be contemplating a visit to the Yukon diggings.

"Hang him!" cried some one in the crowd.

"Shoot him!" shouted another.

"Drive him out of camp, and set him adrift like he done to Jalap Coombs," suggested a third.

"Silence!" roared Judge Platt Riley, standing in his place and gazing sternly about him. "You for-

get, gentlemen, that this is a court of law, and though maybe it isn't run with all the frills of some, it's bound to be respected. Likewise, it proposes to pronounce its own decisions. In regard to the prisoner now awaiting sentence, he has been proved by the testimony of reputable witnesses, and by his own admissions, to be a liar, a traitor, a dog-stealer, which in this country is the same as a hoss-thief in the States, and a robber of his travelling companion under circumstances that make him at the same time come pretty near to being a murderer. For such as he hanging would be none too severe. But we have never yet hanged a man in Forty Mile, and we don't want to begin if we can help it. The prisoner has expressed a desire to learn something of our methods of working these diggings, and we promised to teach him. He has also remarked that moss-stripping was a job well suited to convicts. So be it. Prisoner at the bar, stand up and receive your sentence."

When the wretched man, who had fancied himself in a country where he could commit any crime without fear of punishment, had been assisted to his feet by Marshal Bettens and a volunteer deputy, the judge said:

"By a fair trial, according to Yukon law, you are convicted of crimes such as this community does not allow to go unpunished. On account of them you are hereby sentenced to strip moss from the several claims of this camp during every working-hour of every working-day from now until such time as the first steamer reaches here from the lower river and is ready to return. Then you will be allowed to work your way on her to St. Michaels, where may the agent have mercy upon you.

"In the meantime, when not at work, you will be closely confined in the camp lock-up, under guard of the marshal, who shall be entitled to your services for two

days in every week for his trouble. On other days he will hire you out to any miner who has moss to be stripped, and who will pay for your keep during such time as you may work for him."

This unique but just sentence was greeted with a murmur of approval from the spectators ; but this was quickly silenced by a frown from the judge, who continued :

"All the property that you brought into this camp, including money and outfit, excepting your personal clothing, is hereby confiscated, to be disposed of as follows : One team of dogs, one sledge, and half the cash found in your possession shall be restored to Mr. Jalap Coombs, from whom you helped to steal them. The remainder of the money, after the Indian drivers who came with you have been paid, and one dog team shall be devoted to the relief of Simon Goldollar, who, though he seems to be a pretty bad lot, is still a white man, and so must not be allowed to perish if it can be helped. The third dog team shall become the property of Marshal Bettens in place of a fee for his services. The remainder of the property, provisions, and so forth, shall be devoted to the support of the prisoner during such times as he is working for the marshal. Mr. Bettens will now remove his prisoner, and I hereby declare this court adjourned."

This triumph of the law and Judge Riley's decision gave such universal satisfaction to the spectators of that trial that they yelled with delight as they poured from the court-room door. They congratulated one another on the perfection of their home-made code, and the promptness with which its provisions were dealt out to evil-doers.

From that day on every man in camp exhibited such a lively interest in the moss-stripping operations of Mr. Bradwick-Strengel that many times when, thinking

himself unobserved, he attempted to shirk his work he was roused to renewed industry by the playful pop of a gun, and the warning note of a bullet in close proximity to his place of business. Thus was he given such ample experience of gold-mining on the Yukon that when, some months later, a boat arrived from the lower river, he thankfully departed from Camp Forty Mile, mentally vowing never to return.

After consulting with Phil, Serge, and Jalap Coombs Mr. Platt Riley, who objected to being called "judge" outside of court, decided to intrust Simon Goldollar's rescue from the Indian village in which he had been left to Kurilla and Chitsah, who were persuaded by a liberal payment to return home that way. Another Indian was hired to accompany them as far as Fort Yukon, and bring back word to Forty Mile of their success. If they found him alive and able to travel, they were to carry him with them to Anvik.

Phil wrote and sent him a letter, in which he apologized for having accused him of stealing his money or the fur-seal's tooth, Jalap Coombs having told him the facts concerning these things, and hoped he would return to St. Michaels in safety. Long afterwards he learned that Simon Goldollar did make his way down the river, aided by Kurilla and Chitsah, and was sent on by Gerald Hamer from Anvik to St. Michaels. There he was discharged from the company's employ on account of the failure of his expedition, and finally left Alaska in the same ship that bore ex-convict Strengel from its shores. An amusing feature of it all was that both these rascals attributed the ill success of their undertakings to the unlucky influence of the fur-seal's tooth.

This industrious bit of ivory, which exhibited such a fondness for interfering with the affairs of men and boys, as well as such activity in rapid travel and change

of ownership, reposed for several days in Mr. Platt Riley's vest-pocket, where it had been unconsciously thrust and forgotten. Finally, tired of being thus neglected, it worked a hole through the pocket and fell to the floor. From there it was snapped up by Mr. Riley's favorite dog, who lay at his feet, and doubtless imagined it to be a choice morsel provided for him by his indulgent master. A moment later the judge was aroused from a reverie by the frantic struggles of his dog, who seemed on the point of strangulation. When he succeeded, by prompt effort, in removing the obstruction from the animal's throat, and, with a feeling of superstitious amazement, discovered its nature, he started at once for the store of the Yukon Trading Company, determined to be rid of the uncanny object as quickly as possible.

It so happened that none of the three occupants of the premises was at home, nor were they to be seen in any direction. They had been preparing for departure, and many articles ready for packing on the sledges lay scattered about the room. Among these was a fur sleeping-bag, on which Mr. Riley's eye no sooner rested than he thrust the magic tooth into it and shook it to the very bottom.

"There!" he exclaimed, "they are sure to take it with them; one of them will find it sooner or later, and maybe it will bring him good luck. At any rate, I hope it will."

It was now the month of February, and high time for our travellers to be on their way if they wished to have snow to the end of their sledge journey. Phil had made most satisfactory business arrangements for Gerald Hamer, had sent that gentleman a long report of their progress to date by Kurilla, who also bore letters from himself and Serge to their kind friends at Anvik, and was now impatient to push forward.

So on the morning of the 5th of February, although the thermometer registered forty-eight degrees below zero, the little party set forth from Forty Mile with three sledges and seventeen dogs. Above the first sledge fluttered a small flag, on which appeared the magic letters "U. S. M.," signifying that Phil had undertaken to deliver on the coast a large packet of letters, the first mail ever sent out from Forty Mile in winter.

The entire population of the camp was assembled to see them off; and amid sincere expressions of good-will, a round of hearty cheers, and a ringing volley the sledges dashed away up the Yukon, with seven hundred miles of their journey still to be accomplished.

CHAPTER XXV

SERGE DISCOVERS A CURIOUS CAVERN

AT the point where our travellers had again struck the Yukon, nearly fifteen hundred miles from its mouth, it was still a mighty stream two miles wide. Above this they found it bounded on both sides by mountains that often approached to its very waters, where, in sheer precipices hundreds of feet high, they form gigantic palisades similar to those of the Hudson, which are known as the "Upper Ramparts." On the lower river the sledge party had journeyed over a smooth surface, offering but few obstructions. Their course from Anvik had at first been due north, then northeast, then east, and was now due south, the source of the Yukon towards which they were travelling being some ten degrees south of its great arctic bend.

Owing to this they now found themselves confronted by the hardest kind of sledging over rough, hummocky ice that was often piled in chaotic ridges twenty and thirty feet high. As the river freezes first at its most northerly point, and this belt of solid ice is gradually extended south, or back towards its source, the floating cakes of its upper reaches, borne by the swift current, are piled on the ever-advancing barrier in confused masses that stretch across the river like windrows.

In the spring, when the ice breaks up and is hurled irresistibly down stream on the swollen current, the

same effect is reproduced on a vastly increased scale. Then the upper river breaks first, and a sudden rise of water from some great tributary starts the ice over the still solid barrier below. The huge cakes slide, jam, push, and crash over the still unbroken ice sheet, until they are piled in a vast gleaming mass seventy or eighty feet in height, from a quarter of a mile to one mile in length, and extending from bank to bank.

This mighty gorge must give way at length, and when it does it goes with a roaring fury that is terrifying and grand beyond description. After grinding and tearing onward for several miles, or perhaps less than one, the furious impulse is again checked by another solid barrier, which must in turn be broken down and swept away, its added weight giving increased energy to the mighty force.

So the ice crashes its resistless way down the whole Yukon Valley to Bering Sea, two thousand miles distant, sweeping everything before it, mowing down vast areas of forest, submerging islands, tearing out banks, and leaving everywhere traces of its terrible progress in the shape of huge ice cakes, weighing many tons, stranded high above ordinary water-level.

Although Phil Ryder and his companions were not to witness this grand exhibition of one of nature's mightiest forces, they were sadly inconvenienced and delayed by the uncomfortable fashion in which their frozen highway had been constructed some months earlier. If they could have left the river and followed along its banks they would have done so; but this was out of the question, not only on account of their rugged character, but because on their timbered portions the snow lay many feet in depth, while from the river it had been so blown by strong north winds that for long stretches the ice was barely covered. This enabled the sledge men to walk without snow-shoes, which was

a great comfort to all three, but especially to Jalap Coombs, who had not yet learned to use the netted frames with "ease and fluency," as Phil said.

To this light-hearted youth the sight of his sailor friend wrestling with the difficulties of inland navigation as practised in arctic regions afforded a never-failing source of mirth. A single glance at Jalap's lank figure enveloped in furs, with his weather-beaten face peering from the recesses of a hair-fringed hood, was enough at any time to make Phil laugh. Jalap on snow-shoes that, in spite of all his efforts, would slide in every direction but the one desired, and Jalap gazing at a frosty world through a pair of wooden snow-goggles, were sights that even sober-sided Serge found humorous.

But funniest of all was to see Jalap drive a dog team. This he was now obliged to do, for, while they still had three sledges, they had been unable to procure any Indians at Forty Mile to take the places of Kurilla and Chitsah. So while Phil, who was now an expert in the art of dog-driving, and could handle a six-yard whip like a native, took turns with Serge in breaking the road, Jalap was always allowed to bring up the rear. His dogs had nothing to fear from the whip, except, indeed, when it tripped him up so that he fell on top of them, but they cringed and whined beneath the torrent of incomprehensible sea terms incessantly poured forth by the strange master, who talked to them as though they were so many lubberly sailors.

"Port your hellum! Hard a-port!" he would roar to the accompaniment of flying chunks of ice that he could throw with amazing certainty of aim. Then, "Steady! So! Start a sheet and give her a rap full. Now keep her so! Keep her so! D'ye hear? Let her fall off a fraction of a p'int and I'll rake ye fore and aft. Now, then, bullies, pull all together. Yo-ho,

heave! No sojering! Ah, you will, will ye, ye furry sea-cook! Then take that, and stow it in your bread-locker. Shake your hay-seed and climb—*climb*, I tell ye! Avast heaving!” And so on, hour after hour, while the dogs would jump and pull and tangle their “running-rigging,” as Jalap named the trace-thongs, and the two boys would shout with laughter.

But while the journey thus furnished something of merriment, it was also filled with tribulations. So bitter was the cold that their bloodless lips were often too stiff for laughter or even for speech. So rough was the way that they rarely made more than eight or ten miles in a day of exhausting labor. Several dogs broke their legs amid the chaotic ice blocks of the ever-recurring ridges, and had to be shot. Along the palisaded Ramparts it was difficult to find timbered places in which to camp. Their dog feed was running low, and there was none to be had in the wretched native villages that they passed at long intervals.

At length the setting sun of one evening found them at a point where the river, narrowed to a few hundred yards, was bounded on one side by a lofty precipice of rock, and on the other by a steeply sloping bank that, devoid of timber, seemed to descend from an open plateau. They halted beside a single log of drift that, half embedded in ice, was the only available bit of firewood in sight. It was a bleak and bitter place in which to spend an arctic night, and they shivered in anticipation of what they were to suffer during its long hours.

“I am going to climb to the top of the bank,” said Serge, “and see if I can’t find some more wood. If I do, I’ll roll it down; so look out!”

Suiting his action to his words, the active lad started with a run that carried him a few yards up the steep ascent. It was so abrupt that he was on the point of

sliding back, and dug his feet sharply into the snow to secure a hold. At the same instant he uttered a cry, threw up his arms, and dropped from the sight of his astonished companions as though he had fallen down a well.

Before they could make a move towards his rescue, they were more astounded than ever to hear his voice, somewhat muffled, but apparently close beside them.

"I'm all right!" he cried, cheerily. "That is, I think I am, and I believe I can cut my way out. Don't try to climb the bank. Just wait a minute."

Then the bank began to tremble as though shaken by a gentle earthquake, and suddenly a hand clutching a knife shot out from it so close to Jalap Coombs that the startled sailor leaped back to avoid it, stumbled over a sledge, and plunged headlong among his own team of dogs, who were lying in the snow beyond, patiently waiting to be unharnessed. By the time the yelling, howling mass of man and dogs was disentangled and separated, Serge had emerged from the mysterious bank, and stood looking as though he did not quite understand what had happened. Behind him was a black opening into which Phil was peering with the liveliest curiosity.

"Of all the miracles I ever heard of, this is the strangest!" he cried. "What does it mean, old man?"

"I don't exactly know," answered Serge. "But I rather think it is a moss blanket. Anyhow, that's an elegant place to crawl into out of the cold. Seems to be plenty of wood, too."

Serge was right in his conjecture. What appeared to be the river-bank was merely a curtain of tough, closely compacted Alaskan moss, closely resembling peat in its structure, one foot thick, and reaching from the crest of an overhanging bank to the edge of the river.

It had thus held together, and fallen to its present position when the river undermined and swept away the earth from beneath it. That it presented a sloping surface instead of hanging perpendicularly was owing to a great number of timbers, the ends of which projected from the excavated bank behind it. Serge had broken through the moss curtain, fallen between these timbers to the beach, and then cut his way out. Now, as he suggested, what better camping-place could they ask than the warm, dry, moss-enclosed space from which he had just emerged?

"I never saw nor heard of anything so particularly and awfully jolly in all my life," pronounced Phil, after the three travellers had entered this unique cavern, and started a fire by which they were enabled to see something of its strange interior. "And, I say, Serge, what a thoughtful scheme it was on your part to provide a chimney for the fire before you lighted it! See how the smoke draws up? If it wasn't for that hole in the roof I am afraid we should be driven out of here in short order. But, hello, old man! Whew-w! what are you throwing bones on the fire for? It reminds me of your brimstone-and-feather experiment on Oonimak."

"Bones!" repeated Serge, in surprise. "Are those bones? I thought they were dry sticks."

"I should say they were bones!" cried Phil, snatching a couple of the offending objects from the fire. "And, sure as I live, this log I am sitting on is a bone, too. Why, it's bigger than I am. It begins to look as though this place were some sort of a tomb. But there's plenty of wood. Let's throw on some more and light up."

"Toughest wood to cut I ever see," growled Jalap Coombs, who was hacking away at another half-buried log. "'Pears to be brittle, though, and splits easy," he

added, dodging a sliver that broke off and flew by his head.

“Hold on!” cried Phil, picking up the sliver. “You’ll ruin the axe. That’s another bone you’re chopping. This place is a regular giants’ cemetery.”

CHAPTER XXVI

CAMPING 'MID PREHISTORIC BONES

So strange and uncanny was the place in which our sledge party thus unexpectedly found themselves that Phil was for exploring it and attempting to determine its true character at once; but practical Serge persuaded him to wait until they had performed their regular evening duties and eaten supper. "After that," he said, "we can explore all night if we choose."

So Phil turned his attention to the dogs, which he unharnessed and fed, while Serge prepared supper, and Jalap Coombs gathered a supply of firewood from the bleached timber ends projecting from the bank behind them. He tested each of these before cutting into it to make certain that it was not a bone, quantities of which were mingled with the timber.

The firewood that he thus collected exhibited several puzzling peculiarities. To begin with, it was so very tough and thoroughly lifeless that, as Jalap Coombs remarked, he didn't know but what bones would cut just as easy. When laid on the fire it was slow to ignite, and finally only smouldered, giving out little light, but yielding a great heat. As Serge said, it made one of the poorest fires to see by and one of the best to cook over that he had ever known.

Although in all their experience they had never enjoyed a more comfortable and thoroughly protected camping-place than this one, the lack of their usual cheerful blaze and their mysterious surroundings cre-

ated a feeling of depression that caused them to eat supper in unusual silence. At its conclusion Serge picked up a freshly cut bit of the wood, and, holding it in as good a light as he could get, examined it closely.

“I never saw nor heard of any wood like this in all Alaska,” he said at length. “Do you suppose this can be part of a buried forest that grew perhaps thousands of years ago?”

“I believe that’s exactly what it is,” replied Phil. “I expect it was some awfully prehistoric forest that was blown down by a prehistoric cyclone, and got covered with mud somehow, and was just beginning to turn into coal when the ice age set in. Thus it has been preserved in cold storage ever since. It must have grown in one of the ages that one always likes to hear of, but hates to study about—a palæozoic or silurian or post-tertiary, or one of those times. At any rate, I expect it was a tropical forest, for they all were in those days.”

“Then like as not these here is elephants’ bones,” remarked Jalap Coombs. “I were jest thinking as how this one had a look of ivory about it.”

“They may be,” assented Phil, dubiously, “but they must have belonged to pretty huge old elephants; for I don’t believe Jumbo’s bones would look like more than toothpicks alongside some of these. It is more likely that they belonged to hairy mammoths, or mastodons, or megatheriums, or plessiosauruses, or fellows like that.”

“I don’t know as I ever met up with any of them, nor yet heard tell of ’em,” replied Jalap Coombs, simply, “unless what you’ve jest said is the Latin names of rhinoceroses or hoponthomases or giraffles, of which my old friend Kite Roberson useter speak quite frequent. He allus said consarning ’em, though, that

they'd best be let alone, for lions nor yet taggers warn't a sarcumstance to 'em. Now ef these here bones belonged to any sich critters as them, he sartainly knowed what he were talking about, and I for one are well pleased that they all went dead afore we hove in sight."

"I don't know but what I am too," assented Phil, "for at close range I expect it would be safer to meet one of Mr. Robinson's taggers. Still, I would like to have seen them from a safe place, like the top of Grotton Monument or behind the bars of a bank vault. Where are you going, Serge?"

"Going for some wood that isn't quite so prehistoric and that will blaze," answered the other lad, who had picked up an axe and was stepping towards the entrance to the cavern.

"That's a scheme! Come on, Mr. Coombs. Let's help him tackle that up-to-date log outside, and see if we can't get a modern illumination out of it," suggested Phil.

So they chopped vigorously at the ice-bound drift-log that had induced them to halt at that point, and half an hour later the gloom of their cavern was dispelled by a roaring, snapping, up-to-date blaze. By its cheerful light they examined with intense interest the great fossil bones that, in various stages of preservation, lay scattered about them.

"I should think a whole herd of mammoths must have perished at once," said Phil. "Probably they were being hunted by some antediluvian Siwash and got bogged in a quicksand. How I wish we could see a whole one! But, great Scott! now we have gone and done it!"

Phil's final exclamation was caused by a crackling sound overhead. The sloping moss roof had caught fire from the leaping blaze, and for a moment the dis-

mayed spectators of this catastrophe imagined that their snug camping-place was about to be destroyed. They quickly saw, however, that the body of the moss was not burning; it was too thoroughly permeated with ice for that, and that the fire was only flashing over its dry under surface.

As they watched these fitful flames running along the roof and illuminating remote recesses of the cavern, all three suddenly uttered cries of amazement, and each called the attention of the others to the most wonderful sight he had ever seen. Brilliantly lighted and distinctly outlined against the dark background of a clay bank, that held it intact, was a gigantic skeleton complete in every detail, even to a huge tusk that curved outward from a massive skull. For a single minute they gazed in breathless awe. Then the illuminating flame died out, and like a dissolving picture the vast outline slowly faded from view and was lost in the blackness.

“Was that one of ’em?” gasped Jalap Coombs.

“I expect it was,” answered Phil.

“Waal, then, old Kite didn’t make no mistake when he said a tagger warn’t a sarcumstance.”

“It must have been all of twenty feet high,” remarked Serge, reflectively.

For more than an hour they talked of the wonderful sight, and Phil told what he could remember of the gigantic hairy mammoth discovered frozen in a Siberian glacier, and so perfectly preserved that sledge-dogs were fed for weeks on its flesh.

As they talked their fire burned low, and the outside cold creeping [stealthily into camp turned their thoughts to fur-lined sleeping-bags. So they slept, and dreamed of prehistoric monsters; while Musky, Luvtuk, Amook, and their comrades restlessly sniffed and gnawed at the ancient bones of this strange en-

FOR A SINGLE MINUTE THEY GAZED IN BREATHELESS AWE



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campment, and wondered at finding them so void of flavor.

Glad as our sledge travellers would have been to linger for days and fully explore the mysteries of that great moss-hidden cavern, they dared not take the necessary time. It was already two weeks since they had left the mining camp, winter was waning, and they must leave the river ere spring destroyed its icy highway. So they were off again with the first gray light of morning, and two days later found them at the mouth of the Pelly River, the upper Yukon's largest tributary, and two hundred and fifteen miles from Forty Mile.

The last half of this distance had been traversed amid scenes of the same stupendous grandeur that attracts thousands of tourists to the Yosemite and Yellowstone. But our travellers only shuddered at its wind-swept silence and terrible loneliness. The latter was increased by the melancholy ruins of old Fort Selkirk, whose three gaunt chimneys still stand, about one mile below the mouth of the Pelly, on the opposite side of the Yukon. That evening in the snug quarters of Harper, the Pelly River trader, who was the last white man they could hope to meet before reaching the coast, they listened to the story of Fort Selkirk.

It was established in 1850 by the Hudson Bay Company, and was their remotest post. So far removed was it from the base of supplies that goods destined for it were two full years in making the journey from London by ship and across the great northern wilderness by river and portage. Previous to that time the Indian trade of the Yukon valley had been monopolized by the Chilkats, wealthiest, most enterprising, and most warlike of Alaskan natives. Securing goods from the Russians at Sitka, they would carry them to their dis-

tant villages in canoes, and transport them across the mountains to Yukon head-waters on their backs. There they would be met by the interior Indians, whom they never allowed to visit the coast.

The Chilkats were shrewd enough to reap enormous profits from this trade, and to fully appreciate its value. As soon, therefore, as they learned of the establishment of Fort Selkirk, and realized that it meant the overthrow of their lucrative business, they resorted to the only method of trade competition of which they had any knowledge. They organized a war party, crossed the mountains, descended the Yukon nearly five hundred miles, and wiped Fort Selkirk out of existence, seizing its goods in payment for their trouble.

From the Pelly River trader our travellers gained much valuable information concerning the routes they might pursue and the difficulties they had yet to encounter. They had indeed heard vaguely of the great cañon of the Yukon, through which the mad waters are poured with such fury that they can never freeze, of the rocky Five Fingers that obstruct its channel, the Rink and White Horse rapids, and the turbulent open streams connecting its upper chain of lakes; but until this time they had given these dangers little thought. Now they became real, while some of them, according to the trader, were impassable save by weary détours through dense forests and deep snows that they feared would delay them beyond the time of the river's breaking up.

“What, then, can we do?” asked Phil.

“I'll tell you,” replied the trader. “Leave the Yukon at this point, go about fifty miles up the Pelly, and turn to your right into the Fox. Ascend this to its head, cross Fox Lake, Indian Trail Lake, Lost Lake, and three other small lakes. Then go down a creek that empties into the Little Salmon, and a few miles down that

river to the Yukon. In this way you will have avoided the Five Fingers and the Rink Rapids, and found good ice all the way. After that keep on up the main river till you pass Lake Le Barge. There again leave the Yukon, this time for good, by the first stream that flows in on your right. It is the Tahkeena, and will lead you to the Chilkat Pass, which is somewhat longer, but no worse than the Chilkoot. Thus you will avoid most of the rough ice, the great cañon, and all the rapids."

"But we shall surely get lost," objected Phil.

"Not if you can hire Cree Jim, who lives somewhere up on the Fox River, to go with you, for he is the best guide in the country."

So the next morning Phil and his companions again set forth, this time up the Pelly River, with all their hopes for safety and a successful termination to their journey centred upon the finding and hiring of Cree Jim, the guide.

CHAPTER XXVII

LOST IN THE FOREST

It was not difficult to find the Fox River, for it was the first stream flowing into the Pelly on the right, and as the ice in the latter river was much smoother than it had been on the Yukon, our sledge travellers turned into it on the second day after leaving Harper's.

"Now," said Phil, "we must keep a sharp lookout for Cree Jim's cabin; for as no one seems to know exactly where it is located, we may find it anywhere between here and the head of the stream. At any rate, we can't afford to miss it."

They did miss it though, and, after camping one night on the river, reached its head in a lake that they knew must be the Fox. Although the day was but half spent, Phil decided to camp at that point.

"You and I, Serge," he said, "must go back down the river, one on each side, making long détours away from it, in hopes of finding either the cabin or some trail leading to it. At the same time we must keep a sharp lookout for game. Anything from a bear to a rabbit would be acceptable now, for if we don't replenish our stock of meat pretty soon we shall lose our dogs."

"All right," replied Serge; "only, Phil, do be careful and not get lost."

"Never you fear on that score," laughed the young leader; "I'll look out for myself, but see that you do the same."

So the two lads set forth, leaving Jalap Coombs to prepare camp and boil the oatmeal porridge, which, mixed with a small quantity of fish, now formed the dogs' daily meal.

Phil plunged directly into the forest, deciding to start out with one of the détours that he had planned. Once within shelter of the trees, he found the snow so deep that but for his snow-shoes he could have made no progress. By their aid he was able to push forward at a fair rate of speed, which he determined to maintain on as straight a line as possible until within half an hour of sunset. Then he would bend to the left until he reached the river, which he was certain could not be very far away, and which he could follow back to camp even in the dark.

So for several hours he plodded sturdily forward, keeping a sharp lookout for any trail of man or beast, and making as little noise as possible, in the hope of surprising something worthy of a shot. All at once the surprise came from the other side; for, with a rush from behind a clump of young hemlocks, a huge brown animal, with great palmated horns, crossed his path only a few rods ahead, and dashed away at right angles, flinging the snow to both sides like a rotary railroad plough. Rapid as were his movements, Phil got in one flying shot just as he disappeared.

"It was a moose!" thought the excited lad; "biggest one I ever saw. And I hit him!" he cried aloud, a minute later, as he examined the broad trail left by the flying beast. "Hit him hard, too!" he added, as, noting blood-stains on the snow, and forgetful of everything else, he set forth in hot pursuit of his stricken game. "He can't hold that pace long, wounded, and through snow as deep as this," he reflected, "and I shouldn't be surprised if I found him at bay inside of a mile. Oh, if I can only get him,

it will settle the food question for the rest of the trip!"

So, with high hopes, and with all his hunting instincts fully aroused, Phil followed that blood-stained trail, not only for one mile, but for several more, though without catching another glimpse of the flying moose. Nor could he discover any sign of slackened speed or diminished strength on the part of his huge quarry. The strides were just as long as at first, and the snow was flung just as far on either side of the trail. But for the crimson stains betokening a steady loss of blood, Phil would long since have given up the chase. They encouraged him to keep on, "For surely," he said to himself, "no animal, not even a moose, can stand a drain like that forever."

All at once he stopped short, and gazed about him with startled glances. The trail was growing dim; stealthy shadows were creeping through the forest. The day was spent and night was at hand. "Now I *am* in for it!" he cried, bitterly. "Here I am miles from camp without an idea of its direction or that of the river. My only guide to either is the trail by which I have just come, and I should lose that in the darkness before I had gone half a mile. The only thing to do is to make a hungry camp, and make it quick, too, before the light is wholly gone."

Thus deciding, Phil left the trail and hastened towards a bunch of dead timber that stood a short distance to one side. He scraped the snow from a prostrate log, and then, using one of his snow-shoes as a shovel, dug out a small space down to the ground beside it. A little pile of dry twigs and bark, and a few sticks of larger wood, were hastily collected and heaped against the log. When he got his fire well started he would gather more. Now to whittle a handful of shavings, and then for a blaze. Oh, how good it

would seem! How it would drive away the horrid loneliness, push back the encroaching shadows, and replace the deadly chill of the on-coming night with its own genial warmth! It could not furnish food, of course, and he must endure long hours of hunger, but even that could be borne with its cheery aid.

And now to light it. Phil had a match-safe in one of his inner pockets, where he always carried it for just such emergencies as this, and at length, after a struggle with his close-fitting parka, he drew it forth. As he opened it, and gazed into its empty interior, a chill penetrated his very marrow.

“What a fool I am! what a miserable, careless fool!” he cried, in tones of despair. “I knew it was empty two days ago, and meant to refill it; but I didn’t, and now I must suffer the consequences. What shall I do? what shall I do? A night in this place without a fire will drive me crazy, even if I don’t freeze to death before morning.”

As Phil gazed about him in a very agony of apprehension, his glance rested on his rifle leaning against a tree, and a ray of hope entered his heart. There was fire if he could only capture and control it. How was it that wrecked sailors, and lost hunters, and all sorts of people always managed to obtain fire from a gun, or rather from a pistol, which was practically the same thing? He tried to recall what he had read of such experiences. Oh yes! It was by flashing powder in the pan. But his gun hadn’t any pan. He had never seen one that had, unless it was Kurilla’s flintlock. Of course, now he remembered, it did have a place into which the Indian used to pour a little powder every time he wanted to fire his old blunderbuss. How Phil wished his Winchester were a flintlock musket just at that moment! But it wasn’t, and it didn’t have any pan, and loose powder was not used in connection

with it. But there was plenty of powder incased in its metallic cartridges if only he could get at it, and could contrive some plan for adapting it to his purpose.

All these ideas passed like a flash, and Phil had hardly thought of powder before he was examining one of his cartridges, and trying to dig the bullet out of its metal shell with the point of his knife. But it was held too tightly, and he only pricked his fingers.

Then another plan came into his mind. He laid his rifle on the ground; over its stock he spread a square of cotton cloth such as he and Serge were accustomed to tear from the great piece provided among their stores whenever they needed clean handkerchiefs. On the cloth Phil laid a cartridge, that he held in position with the sharp edge of his knife-blade, placed so that it would cut just at the base of the bullet. Then he struck the back of the blade a smart blow with a billet of wood, and the job was done. He had got at the powder.

He poured out two-thirds of the precious mixture, and rubbed it well into one side of the cloth, which he doubled twice and fixed against the log. Then, after stopping the open end of the shell with a tiny wad of lint to keep the remainder of the powder from running out, he inserted it in the chamber of his rifle. Aiming it at the cloth, with the muzzle about one foot away, and trembling with cold, or excitement, or anxiety, or with all three, he pulled the trigger.

The report that followed was hardly as loud as that of a small fire-cracker, but the success of the scheme was instant. The little flame poured from the muzzle of the rifle into that powder-impregnated square of cotton cloth ignited it at once. A moment later it was nestled amid the bundle of twigs and shavings, while Phil, on hands and knees, was puffing at it like a pair of bellows.

In two minutes more his fire was a certainty, the black shadows were already beginning to retreat before its cheery attack, and Phil Ryder's spirits had jumped from zero almost to the figure that represents light-heartedness.

Throwing off his fur parka, that he might the better appreciate its warmth later, and seizing a snow-shoe, he cleared the whole space between the first log and another that lay a few yards beyond. Into this opening he dragged all the logs and dead branches he could find, working with such energy that at the end of an hour he had a fine large pile, and was in a glow from the exercise. Now he built another fire against the farther log, and piled his spare wood so that it was beyond reach of either flame.

He next spread a few spruce and hemlock boughs on the ground between the two fires, selected a medium-sized chunk of wood for a pillow, donned his parka, drew its great hood over his head, and, with his rifle by his side, lay down on a much warmer and more comfortable couch than he had dared anticipate a couple of hours before.

Phil meant to keep awake so as to tend his fires, but instead of so doing he fell asleep within an hour, and slept soundly right through the night. When he at length awoke and sat up, he was chilled and stiff with cold, for the fires were very nearly extinguished by a fall of snow that had sifted down through the forest while he slept. As the poor lad discovered this he became filled with terror, for he knew that the back trail was obliterated, and that all hope of regaining camp by its means was cut off. Now he was indeed lost. As he gazed hopeless and bewildered about him he caught sight of something that he at first took to be a dog sitting only a few yards away, and regarding him hungrily. He spoke to it, and the animal started to sneak away.

Then he saw that it was a wolf, and he hastened its movements with a rifle-shot.

As it was not yet light enough to commence his search for the river, or for some stream that would lead him to it, he began to throw wood on the fires, that he might at least get warm before starting. While thus engaged he was startled by a cry apparently in the voice of a child that rang dolefully through the silent forest. Again he heard it, plaintive and long-drawn, and this time nearer than before. It was so weird a cry to be heard in that place and at that time that he shuddered as he listened for its repetition. Its very humanness added to its terror. At its third utterance Phil seized his rifle, cocked it, and faced the direction of the sound, expecting in another moment to be confronted by the tawny form of a mountain-lion.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PHIL ASSUMES A RESPONSIBILITY

PHIL had never met nor even seen a mountain-lion, but he had often heard that its cry sometimes imitates that of a child so closely as to deceive the most expert of hunters. He had heard, too, of its ferocity, its boldness in attacking human beings, and its terrible strength. In some respects it is even more to be feared than that monarch of the North American wilderness the grizzly bear, for the former, belonging to the cat family, is a famous tree-climber, which the latter is not.

These thoughts, together with all the stories he had ever read of mountain-lions, flashed through the lad's mind in the few minutes that elapsed between the first and third of those terrible cries. Before it could utter another the fearful beast would be upon him, and with tense muscles he braced himself for the coming conflict. He would not have a chance for more than one shot. If it failed him, all would be lost.

The sound of the third wailing cry had hardly died away when, with a gasp half of relief that the suspense was ended, half of dread, Phil caught a momentary glimpse of a brown furry object moving through the trees. It would next appear from behind yonder clump of bushes. The rifle was slowly lifted, a deliberate sight was taken along its shining barrel, and then, as the furry object appeared at the precise point where it was expected, the forest echoed with its ringing shot. But the bullet had not been allowed to fulfil its fatal

mission. One blessed instant had been granted, even as the trigger was pressed, in which to give the barrel a slight upward jerk, and deflect the leaden messenger from its deadly course.

The rifle fell from Phil's nerveless hand, as weak and faint he leaned against a friendly tree trunk. As he stood there, staring with still unbelieving eyes, a little fur-clad child, not more than four years old, walking on the tiniest of snow-shoes, came close to him, smiled trustfully up in his face, and, holding out a small mittened hand, said :

“Come, man. Come wif Nel-te. Mamma say come.”

If Phil had been nearly paralyzed with horror to discover, as his eye glanced along the levelled rifle-barrel, that he was aiming at a human being, he was almost equally staggered at hearing the fur-clad atom who called himself Nel-te address him in English. How could it be? Who was he? How came he there, alone in that vast wilderness of trackless forest, ice, and snow? Where had the child spent the night just passed, that had been so filled with terrors to him? How had he lived through it? Where *was* his mother?

All these questions and more he asked the child as he sat on a log, and, drawing the little one to him, gazed at him as though he were unreal, and might at any moment vanish as mysteriously as he had come.

But the child evidently had neither the time nor the inclination for explanations. He gravely repelled all the lad's friendly advances, and turned to go away, as though confidently expecting him to follow. As Phil hesitated for a moment he looked back, and in a voice that had a slight tremble, together with a lower lip that quivered just a little, he repeated :

“Come. Mamma say come.”

And Phil, picking up his rifle, followed after the



“COME, MAN. COME WIF NEL TE. MAMMA SAY COME”

unique little figure like one who is dazed. A happy smile lighted the child's face at this compliance with his wish, and after that he plodded sturdily onward without turning his head, as though satisfied that his mission was accomplished. After thus going something less than a quarter of a mile, they emerged from the forest, and came to a log-cabin standing on the bank of a small stream.

Though fairly well built, this cabin did not differ in outward appearance from ordinary structures of its kind in that country, save that its single glass window was hung with white curtains. These caught Phil's eye at once, but ere he had time to speculate concerning them his little guide had reached the door. Slipping off the small snow-shoes, he pushed it open and entered. Phil followed, but had not taken a single step into the interior ere he started back in dismay.

On the floor close beside the threshold lay an Indian—a tall, handsome fellow, but with a terrible gash in his side. From it his life's blood had evidently drained some time before, for it needed but a glance to show that he was dead.

From this startling sight the lad's gaze wandered across the room. It caught the white curtains, a few poor attempts at ornamentation of the walls, an empty hearth, on which was no spark of fire, and then rested on a rude bed in one corner, to which the child had just run with a joyful cry.

On the bed lay a woman, and, to Phil's utter amazement, she was a white woman, who was feebly speaking to him in English. Her bloodless face, terribly emaciated, was surrounded by a wealth of dark-brown hair, and her great eyes were fixed on him with a pitiful eagerness.

"Thank God! thank God, sir!" she said, in a voice so near a whisper that Phil was obliged to bend his

head to catch the words. "Now that you've come, I can die in peace, for my Nel-te will be cared for. I prayed, oh, how I prayed! But it seemed as if my prayers were to be of no avail, until at length the answer came in the report of your gun. Then I sent the child to find you. And oh, sir, I do thank you for coming! I do thank my Heavenly Father for sending you. And you will care for my baby? You will take him far from here, where he may grow to be a good and useful man? You will, won't you, sir? Promise me! Promise me you will."

"But you mustn't die," answered poor Phil, who was so bewildered by the perplexities of the situation that he knew not what to say. "I have two companions who will know what to do for you, and we will stay until you get stronger. What does it all mean, anyway? Are you wounded? Did that Indian attack you?"

"He was my husband, my Jim," answered the woman, again opening her eyes, which had closed wearily after her recent effort at talking. "He died for me, and I am dying for him."

Here she was interrupted by a terrible fit of coughing and a gush of blood from some internal hemorrhage.

After a few minutes she continued: "He shot a moose, and with its last strength it charged on him. When he did not come home I went in search of him. I found them lying together. Jim still breathed. Somehow I managed to bring him home on my back. But he was dead when I got him here, and the strain had been too great for me. I had burst a blood-vessel, and had barely strength to crawl to the bed. That was two days ago. I should have died that first night, but fought with death for Nel-te's sake. Now I can go, and I am glad, for I am so weary—so weary."

This pitiful story was told in whispers, with many pauses and many struggles for breath. When it was finished the great pleading eyes again closed, and the woman lay so still that Phil thought she must be dead. He tried to feel of her pulse, but started at the touch of her hand, for it was like ice. The chill of it seemed to reach his very heart, and he shivered in the deadly cold of the room.

"I can at least make a fire," he thought, and he began to search for matches. There were none, and finally bethinking himself of the blaze he had left in the woods, he set forth to fetch fire from it. In a few minutes he returned with a couple of burning brands. Then he brought in wood, and after a little the great fireplace was filled with leaping flames.

Nel-te came to him and begged for water. Phil had noticed several times that the child was eating snow, and now berated himself for not realizing that the little fellow was thirsty. He melted snow in a kettle, and the boy drank eagerly. Then from some hiding-place he produced a smoked salmon, that he began to eat ravenously. After a little he paused, looked hesitatingly at Phil, and then shyly, but with inborn hospitality, held out the fish to his guest, saying, "You hungry?"

"Indeed I am, little chap," answered Phil, who was just remembering how very hungry he was, "and I shall be only too glad to take a bite with you." So he cut off a piece of the fish, and as the two ate their strange meal in company Phil knew that the little stranger had won his heart; for never had he felt so drawn to any child as to this one.

While they were thus engaged the woman again unclosed her eyes, and made a slight movement. Phil held a cup of water to her lips, and she drank thirstily. It seemed to give her strength, for she said, and this time in clearer tones than before:

“You have not promised me, lad. But you will—I know you will; for God has sent you in answer to my prayers. You will care for my baby, and try to love him, and never let him forget his mother. You will promise, and I know I can trust you, for you have a brave face and honest. You will promise me?”

“I do promise,” said Phil, solemnly, “that if you are taken from your boy I will care for him to the best of my ability, and be to him a brother and—”

“That’s enough, lad. Now hand him to me, for I canna see him. His name is Nelson McLeod.”

This last came in so faint a whisper that Phil barely caught the words; but as he lifted the little one to the bed the woman seemed to gain a new strength, for she flung her arms about the child, strained him to her breast, and kissed him.

Then the wasted arms unclosed. She fell back, a smile glorified her face, and the great brown eyes opened for one parting look at her boy. In another moment, with a sigh of content, she fell into the sleep that knows no waking; and Phil, recalling the long-ago story of the missionary, knew that the sorrows of Ellen McLeod were ended.

CHAPTER XXIX

A WILDERNESS ORPHAN

THE position in which Phil now found himself was certainly a perplexing one. By the very simple process of getting lost he had discovered Cree Jim's cabin, but was appalled to consider what else he had found at the same time. He now knew that the remainder of their journey, its most difficult and dangerous portion, must be undertaken without a guide. Not only this, but they must be burdened with a child so young as to be practically helpless. In the meantime, what was to be done with those silent and motionless forms whose dread presence so pervaded that lonely cabin? And how was he to communicate with his friends? There was no back trail to follow, for the snow had wiped it out. He did not even know in which direction camp lay, for, in the ardor of his chase the evening before, he had taken no note of course nor distance.

There was the stream, though, on whose bank the cabin was perched. It must flow into the river. Yes, that was his only hope. But the river might be miles away, and the camp as much farther off; if, indeed, it could still be found where he had left it. But of course it would be! So long as Serge Belcofsky and Jalap Coombs had life and strength to search for him that camp would remain a permanent fixture until he returned to it. Phil was absolutely sure of that, and he now realized, as never before, the priceless value of a friendship whose loyalty is beyond doubt.

So the plan was formed. He would go down the stream and up the river until he found camp. Then he would bring Serge and a sledge back with him. In the meantime the child must be left where he was, for Phil doubted if he could carry him over the weary miles that he knew must lie between the cabin and camp, while for the little fellow to walk that distance was out of the question.

Phil sat on a stool before the fire while doing all this thinking. As he rose to carry out his plan, Nel-te, who was becoming terrified at his mother's silence in spite of his efforts to attract her attention, slipped from the bed, ran to his new friend, and thrusting a cold little hand into one of his, looked up with a smile of such perfect trust that Phil snatched him in his arms and kissed him, at the same time giving him a great hug.

Then he said : "Now, Nel-te, Brother Phil is going away for a little while to get some doggies for you to play with, and you must stay here like a good boy, and not open the door until he comes back. Do you understand?"

"Yes ; me go get doggies. Nel-te like doggies. Good doggies !" And almost before Phil knew what the child was about, he had slipped from his arms, run to the door, and was putting on the tiny snow-shoes that had been left outside. Then, with an engaging smile, he called, cheerily, "Come. Nel-te say come. Get doggies."

"All right, little chap. I expect your plan is as good as mine, after all," replied Phil, into whose mind had just flashed the promise made to that dead mother—never to desert her baby. "And here I was about to begin by doing that very thing," he reflected as he glanced at the marble face overspread by the expression of perfect content that his promise had brought.

Moved by a sudden impulse he picked up the boy, and, bringing him back, held him so that he might kiss the peaceful face. This the child did with a soft cooing that served to convey both love and pity. Then he ran to the stalwart figure that still lay on the floor, and, patting its swarthy cheek, said something in the Cree tongue that Phil did not understand.

After that Phil carefully closed the door to prevent the intrusion of wild beasts, and the two, whose fortunes had become so strangely interwoven, set forth together down the white surface of the forest-bordered stream, on whose bank Nel-te had been born and passed his few years of life. He was happily but unconsciously venturing on his first "little journey into the world," while his companion was filled with a sense of manliness and responsibility from the experiences through which he had just passed that the mere adding of years could never have brought.

Phil wondered at the ease with which the little fellow managed his snow-shoes, until he reflected that the child had probably been taught to use them from the day of taking his first step. So the two fur-clad figures, ridiculously contrasted in size, trudged along side by side down the winding stream, the one thoughtfully silent and the other chattering of "doggies" until he began to lag behind and give signs that the pace was telling on his slender strength.

"Poor little chap!" said Phil. "But I have been expecting it, and now we will try another scheme." So, slinging the tiny snow-shoes across the child's back, he picked him up and set him astride his own broad shoulders, where Nel-te clutched his head, and shouted with glee at this delightful mode of travel.

After they had gone a mile or so in this fashion they rounded a sharp bend, and came so suddenly upon poor Serge, who was making his way up the

stream in search of some trace of his friend, that for a moment he stood motionless and speechless with amazement. He could make nothing of the approaching apparition until Phil shouted, cheerily :

“Hurrah, old man ! Here we are, safe and sound, and awfully glad to see you.”

“Oh, Phil !” cried Serge, while tears actually stood in his honest blue eyes, “I can hardly believe it ! It seems almost too good to be true. Are you sure you are not wounded nor frozen nor hurt in any way ? Haven’t you suffered terribly ? If you haven’t, we have. I don’t believe Mr. Coombs slept a wink last night, and I know I didn’t. But I am happy enough at this minute to make up for it all, a hundred times over. Oh, Phil !”

“I have suffered a little from anxiety, and been a trifle hungry, and had some sad experiences, but I haven’t suffered half so much as I deserved for my carelessness in getting lost. I found Cree Jim, though ; but—”

“And brought him with you ?” interrupted Serge, smiling for the first time in many hours, as he glanced at the quaint little figure perched on Phil’s shoulders.

“Not exactly,” replied the other, soberly. “You see this little chap is his son, and I’ve adopted him for a sort of a brother, and he is going with us.”

“You’ve done what ?” cried Serge.

“Adopted him. That is, you see I promised my aunt Ruth to bring her something from Alaska that was unique in the way of a curio, and it seems to me that Nel-te here will please her about as well as anything. Don’t you think so ?”

“Perhaps so,” assented Serge, doubtfully. “But was his father willing that you should have him ?”

“Oh yes, perfectly. That is, you know, he is dead, and so is the mother ; but I promised her to take care

of the little chap, and as there wasn't anything else to be done, why, here we are."

"Of course it's all right if you say so," agreed Serge, "and I don't care, so long as you are safe, if you carry a whole tribe back to your aunt Ruth; but now don't you think we'd better be getting along to camp? It was all I could do to persuade Mr. Coombs to stay behind and look out for things; he is so anxious. The only way I could induce him to stay was by suggesting that you might come in tired and hungry, and would feel awfully if no one was there to welcome you. But he is liable to set out on a hunt for you at any moment."

"Certainly, we must get there as quickly as possible," replied Phil. "How far is it?"

"Not more than one mile up the river from the mouth of this creek, which is only a few rods below here. But oh, Phil, to think that I have found you! When I had almost given up all hope of ever again seeing you alive, too. I have been down as far as our first camp on the river this morning, and this creek was my last hope. I wouldn't have left the country without you, though, or at any rate without knowing what had become of you. Neither would Mr. Coombs. We settled that last night while we talked over what had best be done."

"I was sure you wouldn't, old fellow," replied Phil, with something like a choke in his voice. "I knew that as well before you said it as I do now, and it was the thing that kept me up most of all."

The two boys had so much to tell, and so many proofs of loving confidence to exchange, that, before they realized they were anywhere near camp they came upon it, and were hailed by Jalap Coombs, who almost hugged Phil in his revulsion of feeling and unaffected joy at the lad's return.

“But you don’t do it again, Philip, my son!” he cried. “That is, the next time you feel inclined to wander from home and stay out nights, you may go, of course, but you’ll have to take me along. So ef you gits lost, I gits lost likewise; for, as my old friend Kite Roberson useter say consarnin prodegal sons, ‘It’s allus toughest on them as is left behind.’ But, Phil, what be ye doing with that furry little beggar? Is he the pilot ye went sarching for?”

“Yes,” laughed Phil, lifting Nel-te down from his shoulders. “He is the pilot who is to lead us from this wilderness, and if you have got anything to eat, you’d better give it to him before he devours one of the dogs, which he seems inclined to do. I can answer for it that he has been on short rations for several days and is properly hungry.”

“Have I got anything to eat?” cried the other. “Waal, rather! How does fresh steaks, and roasts, and chops, and stews strike your fancy?” With this he pointed to one side of the camp, where, to their astonishment, the boys saw a quantity of fresh meat, much of which was already cut into thin strips for freezing and packing.

“Where did it come from?” queried Phil, looking at Serge; but the latter only shook his head, evidently equally puzzled.

“It’s jist a bit of salvage that I raked in as it went drifting by,” explained Jalap Coombs, his face beaming with gratified pride. “It’s some kind of deer meat, and *for* a deer he were pretty nigh as big as one of them elephants back yonder in the moss cave. You see, he came cruising along this way shortly after Serge left, and the dogs give chase and made him heave to. When I j’ined ’em he surrendered. Then I had my hands full in a hurry, driving off the dogs and lashing ’em fast so as they couldn’t eat him, horns and all, and

cutting of him up. I hain't more 'n made a beginning with him either, for there's pretty nigh a full cargo left."

"But how did you kill him? There wasn't any gun in camp?" asked Phil, utterly bewildered.

"Of course there warn't no gun," answered Jalap Coombs, "and likewise I didn't need one. Sich things I leave for boys. How did I kill him, say you? Why, I jest naterally harpooned him like I would any other whale."

CHAPTER XXX

JALAP AND THE DOGS SING A LULLABY .

“HARPOONED a moose!” cried Phil and Serge together; for they had by this time discovered the nature of the sailor’s “big deer.” And “Where did you get the harpoon?” asked the former.

“Found it leaning agin a tree while I were out after firewood,” replied Jalap Coombs, at the same time producing and proudly exhibiting a heavy A-yan spear, such as were formerly used by the natives of the Pelly river valley. “It were a trifle rusty, and a trifle light in the butt,” he added, “but it come in mighty handy when it were most needed, and for an old whaler it aren’t a bad sort of a weepoon. I’m free to say, though, that I might have had hard luck in tackling the beast with it ef he hadn’t been already wounded. I didn’t know it till after he were dead; but when I come to cut him up, I saw where he’d been bleeding pretty free, and then I found this bullet in his innards. Still, I don’t reckon you’d have called him a mouse, nor yet a rat, if ye’d seed him like I did under full sail, with his horns set wing and wing, showing the spread of a fifty-ton schooner. Ef I hadn’t had the harpoon I’d left him severely alone; but I allowed that a weepoon as were good enough for a whale would do for a deer, even ef he were bigger than the run.”

“It’s a rifle-bullet, calibre forty-four,” said Phil, who was examining the bit of lead that Jalap Coombs had taken from his “big deer.” “I wonder if it can be

possible that he is the same moose I wounded, and without whose lead I should never have found Cree Jim's cabin. It seems incredible that he should have come right back to camp to be killed, though I suppose it is possible. Certainly good fortune, or good luck, or whatever else you choose to call it, does seem to be pretty steadily on our side, and without the aid of the fur-seal's tooth either," he added, with a sly glance at Serge.

The latter was already hard at work cooking a bountiful supply of the meat so wonderfully provided for them, while Nel-te, who had been left to his own devices for several minutes, had made his way to the "doggies," and was rolling over and over in the snow with Musky and Luvtuk and big Amook. They were treating him exactly as they would a frolicsome puppy, and their joyous barkings were mingled with his shrill screams of delight in a happy chorus. The little chap could hardly be persuaded to leave his new play-mates long enough to eat dinner, and returned to them the moment his appetite was satisfied.

As soon as the meal was finished Phil and Serge slipped away, taking a sledge, to which was lashed a couple of axes, with them. They were going back to bury the parents of the child, who was so happily oblivious of the sad nature of their errand that he did not even take note of their departure.

The lads had no idea of how they should accomplish their sorrowful task. Even with proper tools they knew it would be impossible to dig a grave in the frozen ground, and, as they had only axes with which to work, this plan was dismissed without discussion. They talked of building a tomb of logs, but decided that to make it proof against wild beasts would take more time than they could afford. Serge suggested a scaffold, on which the bodies might be placed, in Ind-

ian fashion, while Phil thought that, by taking up the floor of the cabin, they might find earth in which they could dig. He could not bear the thought that one who had been brought up in the ways of civilization, and who had moreover suffered as had poor Ellen McLeod, should have aught save a Christian burial; and when he told Serge the sad story of her life as he had learned it from the missionary at Anvik, the latter agreed with him.

So they had not settled on any plan when they rounded the last bend of the little stream and gained a point from which the cabin should have been visible. Then they saw at a glance that the task they had been dreading had been accomplished without their aid. There was no cabin; but a cloud of smoke rising from its site, as from an altar, gave ample evidence of its fate. A blazing log from the fire Phil left on its hearth must have rolled out on the floor directly after his departure. Now only a heap of ashes and glowing embers remained to mark the site of Nel-te's home.

"It is best so," said Phil, as the two lads stood beside the smouldering ruins of what had been a home and was now become a sepulchre. "And oh, Serge! think of what might have been the child's fate if I had left him behind, as I at first intended. Poor little chap! I realize now, as never before, how completely his past is wiped out, and how entirely his future lies in our hands. It is a trust that came without our seeking, but I accepted it; and now, beside his mother's ashes, I swear to be true to the promise I gave her."

"Amen!" said Serge, softly, as though at the conclusion of a prayer, and Phil knew that the little wilderness orphan had found another friend who would be as loyal as himself.

They planted a rude wooden cross, the face of which was chipped to a gleaming whiteness, close in front of

the smouldering heap, and near it Serge fastened a streamer of white cloth to the tip of a tall young spruce. Cutting off the limbs as he descended, he left it a slender pole, and thus provided the native symbol of a place of burial.

Having thus done all that was left them to do, the boys retraced their way down the little stream and up the river, through the gathering dusk, to the camp that to them was home.

As they approached it they were astonished to hear Jalap Coombs singing in bellowing tones the rollicking old sea chanty of "Roll a Man Down!"

"A flying-fish-catcher from old Hong-Kong—
 Yo ho! roll a man down—
 A flying-fish-catcher comes bowling along;
 Give us some time to roll a man down,
 Roll a man up and roll a man down,
 Give us some time to roll a man down.
 From labbord to stabbord away we go—
 Yo ho! roll a man down."

Jalap's voice was not musical, but it possessed a mighty volume, and as the quaint sea chorus roared and echoed through the stately forest, the very trees appeared to be listening in silent wonder to the unaccustomed sounds. Even Musky, Luvtuk, big Amook, and the other dogs seemed by their dismal howlings to be expressing either appreciation or disapprobation of the sailor-man's efforts.

The performers in this open-air concert were too deeply intent on their own affairs to pay any heed to the approach of the returning sledge party, who were thus enabled to come within full view of a most extraordinary scene unnoticed. Just beyond the camp, in a semicircle, facing the fire, a dozen dogs, resting on their haunches, lifted both their voices and sharp-

pointed noses to the sky. On the opposite side of the fire sat Jalap Coombs, holding Nel-te in his arms, rocking him to and fro in time to the chorus that he was pouring forth with the full power of his lungs, and utterly oblivious to everything save his own unusual occupation of putting a baby to sleep.

“Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!” roared Phil and Serge, unable to restrain their mirth a moment longer. “Oh my! oh my! Oh, Mr. Coombs, you’ll be the death of me yet! Whatever are you doing? Didn’t know you could sing! What a capital nurse you make! What a soft voice for lullabies! The dogs, too! Oh dear! I shall laugh at the thought of this if I live to be a hundred! Don’t mind us, though. Keep right on. Please do!”

But the concert was ended. Jalap Coombs sprang to his feet with a startled yell, and dropped the child, who screamed with the fright of his sudden awakening. The dogs, whose harmonious howlings were so abruptly interrupted, slunk away with tails between their legs, and hid themselves in deepest shadows.

“There, there, little chap! Don’t be frightened,” cried Phil, darting forward and picking up the child, though still shaking with laughter. “It’s all right now. Brother Phil will protect you, and not let the big man frighten you any more.”

“I frighten him indeed!” retorted Jalap Coombs, indignantly. “He was sleeping quiet and peaceful as a seal pup; and I were jest humming a bit of a ditty that useter be sung to me when I were a kid, so’s he’d have something pleasant to dream about. Then you young swabs had to come creeping up and yell like a couple of wild hoodoos, and set the dogs to howling and scare the kid, to say nothing of me, which ef I had ye aboard ship I’d masthead ye both till ye larnt manners. Oh, ye may snicker! But I have my opinion all the same

"A FLYING-FISH-CATCHER FROM OLD HONG-KONG—YO HO! ROLL A MAN DOWN!"



W. A. Rogers

of any man as 'll wake a sleeping child, specially when he's wore out with crying, all on account of being deserted. And I'm not the only one nuther. There was old Kite Roberson useter clap a muzzle onto his wife's canary whenever she'd get the kids to sleep, for fear the critter 'd bust into singing. But it's all right. You'll know how it is yourselves some day."

Phil, seeing that, for the first time since he had known him, the mate was thoroughly indignant, set out to smooth his ruffled feelings.

"Why, Mr. Coombs," he said, "we didn't mean to startle you, but those wretched dogs kept up such a howling that we couldn't make ourselves heard as we neared camp. I'm sure I don't see how you could think we were laughing at you. It was those absurd dogs, and you'd have laughed yourself if you'd looked up and seen them. I'm sure it was awfully good of you to take so much trouble over this little fellow, and put him so nicely to sleep with your sing—I mean with your humming, though I assure you we didn't hear a hum."

"Waal," replied Jalap Coombs, somewhat mollified by Phil's attitude, "I warn't humming very loud, not nigh so loud as I had been at fust. Ye see, I were kinder tapering off so as to lay the kid down, and begin to get supper 'gainst you kim back."

"Yes, I see," said Phil, almost choking with suppressed laughter. "But how did it happen that you were compelled to act as nurse? The little chap seemed happy enough when we went away."

"So he were, till he found you was gone. Then he begun to pipe his eye and set storm signals, and directly it come on to blow a hurricane with heavy squalls. So I had to stand by. Fust off I thought the masts would surely go; but I took a reef here and there, and kinder got things snugged down, till after

a while the sky broke, the sun kim out, and fair weather sot in once more."

"Well," said Phil, admiringly, "you certainly acted with the judgment of an A No. 1 seaman, and I don't believe even your esteemed friend Captain Robinson could have done better. We shall call on you whenever our little pilot gets into troubled waters again, and feel that we are placing him in the best possible hands."

At which praise Jalap Coombs was greatly pleased, and said as how he'd be proud at all times to stand by the kid. Thus on the same day that little Nel-te McLeod lost his parents he found a brother and two stanch friends.

CHAPTER XXXI

NEL-TE QUALIFIES AS A BRANCH PILOT

ALTHOUGH disappointed of their guide, there was nothing for the sledge party to do but push on and trust to their own good judgment to carry them safely to the end of their journey. So as much of the moose meat as could be loaded on a sledge, or several hundred pounds in all, was prepared and frozen that evening. Both then and in the morning the dogs were given all they could eat—so much, in fact, that they were greatly disinclined to travel during most of the following day.

The latest addition to the party, after being rudely awakened from the slumber into which Jalap Coombs's singing had lulled him, called pitifully for his mother, and, refusing to be comforted, finally sobbed himself to sleep on Phil's bear-skin in front of the fire. Here he spent the night, tucked warmly in a rabbit-skin robe, nestled between Phil and Serge with all his sorrows forgotten for the time being. In the early morning he was a very sober little lad, with a grievance that was not to be banished even by the sight of his beloved "doggies," while the advances of his human friends were met by a dignified silence. He was too hungry to refuse the food offered him by Serge ; but he ate it with a strictly business-like air, in which there was nothing of unbending nor forgiveness. To Phil's attempts at conversation he turned a deaf ear, nor would he even so much as smile when Jalap

Coombs made faces at him, or got down on hands and knees and growled for his special benefit. He was evidently not to be won by any such foolishness.

He was roused to an exhibition of slight interest by the tinkling music of Musky's bells when the dogs were harnessed; and when, everything being ready for a start, Phil lifted him on the foremost sledge, and tucked him into a spare sleeping-bag that was securely lashed to it, he murmured: "Mamma, Nel-te go mamma."

The loads having been redistributed to provide for the accommodation of the young passenger, this foremost sledge bore, besides Nel-te, only the Forty Mile mail, the sleeping equipment of the party, and their extra fur clothing, the chynik, in which was stored the small quantity of tea still remaining, what was left of the pemmican, and an axe. As, with its load, it did not weigh over two hundred pounds, its team was reduced to three dogs, Musky, Luvtuk, and big Amook. Serge still drove seven dogs, and his sledge bore the entire camp equipment and stock of provisions, except the recently acquired moose meat. This was loaded on the last sledge, which was drawn by five dogs, and driven by Jalap Coombs according to his own peculiar fashion.

As soon as the sledges were in motion, and Nel-te conceived the idea that he was going home, his spirits revived to such an extent that he chirruped cheerfully to the dogs, and even smiled occasionally at Phil, who strode alongside.

They crossed Fox Lake, passed up the stream that connected it with Indian Trail Lake, and finally went into camp on the edge of the forest at the head of the latter earlier than usual, because they could not see their way to the making of any further progress. Although they felt certain that there must be some stream

flowing into the lake by which they could leave it, they could discover no sign of its opening. So they made camp, and, leaving Jalap Coombs to care for it, Phil and Serge departed in opposite directions to scan every foot of the shore in search of a place of exit.

On reaching this camping-place Nel-te looked about him inquiringly and with evident disappointment, but he said nothing, and only gazed wistfully after the two lads when they set forth on their search. For a time he hung about the camp-fire watching Jalap Coombs, who was too busily engaged in cooking supper and preparing for the night to pay much attention to him. At length the little chap strolled over to the sledges, and engaged in a romp with the three dogs who dragged his particular conveyance. Every now and then his shrill laughter came to Jalap's ears, and assured the latter that the child was safe.

After a while the explorers returned, both completely discouraged and perplexed.

"I don't believe there is any inlet to this wretched lake!" cried Phil, flinging himself down on a pile of robes. "I've searched every foot of coast on my side, and am willing to swear that there isn't an opening big enough for a rabbit to squeeze through, so far as I went."

"Nor could I find a sign of one," affirmed Serge, "though perhaps in the morning—"

"Hello! Where's Nel-te?" interrupted Phil, springing to his feet and gazing about him anxiously.

"He were about here jest as you boys kim in," replied Jalap Coombs, suspending operations at the fire, and gazing about him with a startled expression. "I heered him playing with the dogs not more'n a minute ago."

"Well, he isn't in sight now," said Phil, in a voice whose tone betrayed his alarm, "and if we don't find

him in a hurry there's a chance of our not doing it at all, for it will be dark in fifteen minutes more."

As he spoke, Phil hastily replaced the snow-shoes that he had just laid aside. Serge did the same thing, and then they began to circle about the camp with heads bent low in search of the tiny trail. At short intervals they called aloud the name of the missing one, but only the mocking forest echoes answered them.

Suddenly Serge uttered a joyful shout. He had found the prints of small snow-shoes crossed and re-crossed by those of dogs. In a moment Phil joined him, and the two followed the trail together. It led for a short distance along the border of the lake in the direction previously taken by Phil, and then, making a sharp bend to the right, struck directly into the forest.

When the boys reached the edge of the timber they found a low opening so overhung by bushes as to be effectually concealed from careless observation. The curtaining growth was so bent down with a weight of snow that even Nel-te must have stooped to pass under it. That he had gone that way was shown by the trail still dimly visible in the growing dusk, and the lads did not hesitate to follow. Forcing a path through the bushes, which extended only a few yards back from the lake, they found themselves in an open highway, evidently the frozen surface of a stream.

"Hurrah!" shouted Phil, who was the first to gain it. "I believe this is the very creek we have been searching for. It must be, and the little chap has found it for us."

"Yes," replied Serge. "It begins to look as though Cree Jim's son had taken Cree Jim's place as guide."

Now the boys pushed forward with increased speed. At length they heard the barking of dogs, and began to shout, but received no answer. They had gone a

full quarter of a mile from the lake ere they caught sight of the little fur-clad figure plodding steadily forward on what he fondly hoped to be his way towards home and the mother for whom his baby heart so longed. Musky, Luvtuk, and big Amook were his companions, and not until he was caught up in Phil's arms did the child so much as turn his head or pay the slightest heed to those who followed his trail.

As he was borne back in triumph towards camp his lower lip quivered, and two big tears rolled down his chubby cheeks, but he did not cry nor utter a complaint; nor from that time on did he make further effort to regain his lost home. The boys had hardly begun to retrace their steps when another figure loomed out of the shadows and came rapidly towards them. It looked huge in the dim light, and advanced with gigantic strides.

"Hello!" cried Phil, as he recognized the newcomer. "Where are you bound?"

"Bound to get lost along with the rest of the crew," replied Jalap Coombs, stoutly. "Didn't I tell ye I wouldn't put up with your gettin' lost alone ag'in?"

"That's so; but you see I forgot," laughed Phil. "Now that we are all found, though, let's get back to the supper that you were cooking before you decided to get lost. By the way, Mr. Coombs, do you realize that this is the very stream for which we have been hunting? What do you think of our young pilot now?"

"Think of him!" exclaimed Jalap Coombs. "I think he's jest the same as all in the piloting business—pernicketty. Knows a heap more'n he'll ever tell, and won't ever p'int out a channel till you're just about to run aground. Then he'll do it kinder keerless and on-consarned, same as the kid done jest now. Oh, he's a regular branch pilot, he is, and up to all the tricks of the trade."

Bright and early the following morning, thanks to Nel-te's pilotage, the sledges were speeding up the creek on their way to Lost Lake. By nightfall they had crossed it, three other small lakes, descended an outlet of the last to Little Salmon River, and after a run of five miles down that stream found themselves once more amid the ice hummocks of the Yukon, one hundred and twenty miles above the mouth of the Pelly. Of this distance they had saved about one-third by their adventurous cut-off.

The end of another week found them one hundred and fifty miles farther up the Yukon and at the mouth of the Tahkeena. It had been a week of the roughest kind of travel, and its hard work was telling severely on the dogs.

As they made their last camp on the mighty river they were to leave for good on the morrow, they were both glad and sorry. Glad to leave its rough ice and escape the savage difficulties that it offered in the shape of cañons and roaring rapids only a few miles above, and sorry to desert its well-marked course for the little-known Tahkeena.

Still, their dogs could not hold out for another week on the Yukon, while over the smooth going of the tributary stream they might survive the hardships of the journey to its very end; and without these faithful servants our travellers would indeed be in a sorry plight. So, while they reminisced before their roaring camp-fire of the many adventures they had encountered since entering Yukon mouth, two thousand miles away, they looked hopefully forward to their journey's end, now less than as many hundred miles from that point. To the dangers of the lofty mountain range they had yet to cross they gave but little thought, for the mountains were still one hundred miles away.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE FUR-SEAL'S TOOTH CREATES A SENSATION

ONE evening late in March the smoke of a lonely camp-fire curled above a fringe of stunted spruces forming the timber-line high up on the northern slope of the Alaskan coast range. Kotusk, the natives call these mountains. Far below lay the spotless sheet of Takh Lake, from which the Tahkeena winds for one hundred miles down its rugged valley to swell the Yukon flood. From the foot of the mountains the unbroken solitude of the vast northern wilderness swept away in ice-bound silence to the polar sea. Far to the westward St. Elias and Wrangel, the great northern sentinels of the Rocky Mountain system, reared their massive heads nearly twenty thousand feet above the Pacific. From them the mighty range of snow-clad peaks follows the coast line eastward, gathering with icy fingers the mist clouds ever rising from the warm ocean waters, converting them with frigid breath into the grandest glaciers of the continent, and sending these slowly grinding their resistless way back to the sea.

On one side of this stupendous barrier our sledge party from the Yukon was now halted. On the other lay the frontier of civilization, safety, and their journey's end. Between the two points rose the mountains, calmly contemptuous of human efforts to penetrate their secrets of avalanche and glacier, icy precipice and snow-filled gorge, fierce blizzard and ice-laden

whirlwind, desolation and death. It is no wonder that, face to face with such things, the little group, gathered about the last camp-fire they might see for days or or perhaps forever, should be unusually quiet and thoughtful.

Still clad in their well-worn garments of fur, they were engaged in characteristic occupations. Phil, looking anxious and careworn, was standing close to the fire warming and cleaning his rifle. Serge was making a stew of the last of their moose meat, which would afterwards be frozen and taken with them into untimbered regions where camp-fires would be unknown. Jalap Coombs was thoughtfully mending a broken snow-shoe, and at the same time finding his task sadly interrupted by Nel-te, who, nestled between his knees, was trying to attract the sailor-man's undivided attention.

The little chap, with his great sorrow forgotten, was now the life and pet of the party. So firmly was his place established among them that they wondered how they had ever borne the loneliness of a camp without his cheery presence, and could hardly realize that he had only recently come into their lives. Now, too, half the anxiety with which they regarded the perilous way before them was on his account.

"I'm worrying most about the dogs," said Phil, continuing a conversation begun some time before, "and I am afraid some of them will give out before we reach the summit."

"Yes," agreed Serge; "to-day's pull up from the lake has told terribly on them, and Amook's feet have been badly cut by the crust ever since he ate his boots."

"Poor old dog!" said Phil. "It was awfully careless of me to forget and leave them on him all night. I don't wonder a bit at his eating them, though, considering the short rations he's been fed on lately."

The dogs were indeed having a hard time. Worn by months of sledge-pulling over weary leagues of snow and ice, their trials only increased as the tedious journey progressed. The days were now so long that each offered a full twelve hours of sunlight, while the snow was so softened by the growing warmth that in the middle of the day it seriously clogged both snowshoes and sledges. Then a crust would form, through which the poor dogs would break for an hour or more, until it stiffened sufficiently to bear their weight. Added to these tribulations was such a scarcity of food that half-rations had become the rule for every one, men as well as dogs, excepting Nel-te, who had not yet been allowed to suffer on that account. Of the many dogs that had been connected with the expedition at different times only nine were now left, and some of these would evidently not go much farther.

As the boys talked of the condition of these trusty servants, and exchanged anxious forebodings concerning the crossing of the mountains, their attention was attracted by an exclamation from Jalap Coombs. Nel-te had been so insistent in demanding his attention that the sailor-man was finally obliged to lay aside his work and lift the child to his knees, saying,

“Waal, Cap’n Kid, what’s the orders now, sir?”

“Cap’n Kid” was the name he had given to the little fellow on the occasion of the latter’s début as pilot; for, as he said, “Every branch pilot answers to the hail of cap’n, and this one being a kid becomes ‘Cap’n Kid’ by rights.”

For answer to his question the child held out a small fur-booted foot, and intimated that the boot should be pulled off.

“Bad foot, hurt Nel-te,” he said.

“So! something gone wrong with your running rig-

ging, eh?" queried Jalap Coombs, as he pulled off the offending boot. Before he could investigate it the little chap reached forward, and, thrusting a chubby hand down to its very toe, drew forth in triumph the object that had been annoying him. As he made a motion to fling it out into the snow, Jalap Coombs, out of curiosity to see what had worried the child, caught his hand. The next moment he uttered the half-terrified exclamation that attracted the attention of Phil and Serge.

As they looked they saw him holding to the firelight between thumb and finger, and beyond reach of Nel-te, who was striving to regain it, an object so strange and yet so familiar that for a moment they regarded it in speechless amazement.

"The fur-seal's tooth!" cried Phil. "How can it be?"

"It can't be our fur-seal's tooth," objected Serge, in a tone of mingled incredulity and awe. "There must be several of them."

"I should think so myself," replied Phil, who had taken the object in question from Jalap Coombs for a closer examination, "if it were not for a private mark that I scratched on it when it was in our possession at St. Michaels. See, here it is, and so the identity of the tooth is established beyond a doubt. But how it ever got here I cannot conceive. There is actually something supernatural about the whole thing. Where did you say you found it, Mr. Coombs?"

"In Cap'n Kid's boot," replied the mate, who had just restored that article to the child's foot. "But blow me for a porpus ef I kin understand how ever it got there. Last time I seen it 'twas back to Forty Mile."

"Yes," said Serge, "Judge Riley had it."

"I remember seeing him put it into a vest-pocket,"

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added Phil, "and meant to ask him for it, but forgot to do so. Now to have it appear from the boot of that child, who has never been to Forty Mile, or certainly not since we left there, is simply miraculous. It beats any trick of spiritualism or conjuring I ever heard of. The mystery of the tooth's appearing at St. Michaels after my father lost it, only a short time before at Oonalaska, was strange enough; but that was nothing to this."

"There must be magic in it," said Serge, who from early associations was inclined to be superstitious. "I don't care, though, if there is," he added, stoutly. "I believe the tooth has come to us at this time of our despondency as an omen of good-fortune, and now I feel certain that we shall pull through all right. You remember, Phil, the saying that goes with it: 'He who receives it as a gift receives good-luck.'"

"Who has received it as a gift this time?" inquired the Yankee lad.

"We all have, though it seems to have been especially sent to Nel-te, and you know he is the one we were most anxious about."

"That's so," assented Phil, "and from this time on Nel-te shall wear it as a charm, though I suppose it won't stay with him any longer than suits its convenience. I never had a superstition in my life, and haven't believed in such things, but I must confess that my unbelief is shaken by this affair. There isn't any possible way, that I can see, for this tooth to have got here except by magic of some kind."

"It beats the *Flying Dutchman* and merrymaids," said Jalap Coombs, solemnly, as he lighted his pipe for a quieting smoke. "D'ye know, lads, I'm coming to think as how it were all on account of this 'ere curio being aboard the steamer *Norsk* that she stopped and picked you up in Bering Sea that night."

“Nonsense !” cried Phil. “That is impossible.”

Thus purely through ignorance this lad, who was usually so sensible and level-headed, declared with one breath his belief in an impossibility, and with the next his disbelief of a fact. All of which serves to illustrate the folly of making assertions concerning subjects about which we are ignorant. There is nothing so mysterious that it cannot be explained, and nothing more foolish than to declare a thing impossible simply because we are too ignorant to understand it.

In the present case Serge and Jalap Coombs, and even Phil, who should have known better, were ready to believe that the fur-seal's tooth had come to them through some supernatural agency, because, in their ignorance, they could not imagine how it could have come in any other way. We laugh at their simplicity because of our wisdom. We saw Mr. Platt Riley drop the tooth into one of their sleeping-bags at Forty Mile. Knowing this, it is easy to understand how that same sleeping-bag, which happened to be the extra one acquired by the turning over to Jalap Coombs of Strenge's stolen property, should be selected as Nel-te's travelling-bag, and lashed to a sledge for his occupancy in the daytime. In his restlessness he had kicked the tooth about until it finally worked its way into one of his little fur boots, and that is all there was to the mystery.

Still, it afforded a fertile topic for conversation around that lonely mountain-side camp-fire long after Phil had strung it on a buckskin thong and hung it about the child's neck, at the same time taking the precaution to tuck it snugly inside his little fur parka. All agreed that they were glad to have the fur-seal's tooth in their possession once more ; and on account of its presence among them they were ready to face the difficulties that would confront them on the morrow with a cheerful confidence.

CHAPTER XXXIII

LOST IN A MOUNTAIN BLIZZARD

TIRED as were the occupants of that lonely camp after a day of exhausting climbing up through the timber, their slumbers were broken and restless. The uncertainties of the morrow, the peculiar nature of the road they had yet to travel, and the excitement consequent upon nearing the end of their journey, which none of them believed to be over fifty miles away, all combined to render them wakeful and uneasy. So they were up by the first sign of daylight, and off before sunrise.

As there were now but three dogs to a sledge, the load of the one driven by Serge was divided between it and the one that brought up the rear in charge of Jalap Coombs. A few sticks of dry wood were also placed on each sledge, so that in crossing the upper ice-fields they might at least be able to melt snow for drinking purposes.

“Now for it!” cried Phil, cheerfully, as they emerged from the scanty timber, and shivered in the chill blast that swept down from the towering peaks above them. Between two of these was a saddle-like depression that they took to be the pass, and to it the young leader determined to guide his little party.

“Up you go, Musky!” he shouted. “Pull, Luvtuk, my pigeon! Amook, you old rascal, show what you are good for! A little more work, a little more hunger, and then rest, with plenty to eat. So stir yourselves and climb!”

With this the long whip-lash whistled through the frosty air and cracked with a resounding report that would have done credit to the most expert of Eskimo drivers, for our Phil was no longer a novice in its use, and with a yelp the dogs sprang forward.

Up, up, up they climbed, until, as Phil remarked, it didn't seem as though the top of the world could be very far away. The sun rose and flooded the snow-fields with such dazzling radiance that but for their protecting goggles our travellers must have been completely blinded by the glare. The deep gulch whose windings they followed held in summer-time a roaring torrent; but now it was filled with solidly packed snow from twenty-five to one hundred feet deep.

As they advanced the gulch grew more and more shallow, until at length it was merged in a broad, uniform slope so steep and slippery that they were obliged to cut footholds in the snow, and at frequent intervals carve out little benches two feet wide. From one of these to another they dragged the sledges, one at a time, with rawhide ropes. Even the dogs had to be assisted up the glassy incline, on which they could gain no hold. So arduous was this labor that three hours were spent in overcoming the last five hundred feet of the ascent. Thus it was long past noon when, breathless and exhausted, the party reached the summit, or rather a slope so gentle that the dogs could once more drag the sledges.

Here, at an elevation of nearly five thousand feet above the sea, they paused for breath, for a bite of lunch, and for a last look back over the way they had come. From this elevation their view embraced a sweep of over one hundred miles of mountain and plain, river and forest. It was so far-reaching and boundless that it even seemed as if they could take in the whole vast Yukon Valley, and locate points that

common-sense told them were a thousand miles beyond their range of vision. Grand as was the prospect, they did not care to look at it long. Time was precious ; the air, in spite of its sunlight, was bitterly chill, and, after all, the mighty wilderness now behind them held too many memories of hardship, suffering, and danger to render it attractive.

So, "Hurrah for the coast !" cried Phil.

"Hurrah for Sitka !" echoed Serge.

"Hooray for salt water ! Now, bullies, up and at 'em !" roared Jalap Coombs, expressing a sentiment and an order to his sailor-bred dogs in a breath.

In a few moments more the wonderful view had disappeared, and the sledges were threading their way amid a chaos of gigantic bowlders and snow-covered landslides from the peaks that rose on both sides. There was no sharp descent from the summit, such as they had hoped to find, but instead a lofty plateau piled thick with obstructions. About them no green thing was to be seen, no sign of life ; only snow, ice, and precipitous cliffs of bare rock. The all-pervading and absolute silence was awful. There was no trail that might be followed, for the hardiest of natives dared not attempt that crossing in the winter. Even if they had, their trail would have been obliterated almost as soon as made by the fierce storms of those altitudes. So their only guide was that of general direction, which they knew to be south, and to this course Phil endeavored to hold.

That night they made a chill camp in the lee of a great bowlder ; that is, in as much of a lee as could be had, where the icy blast swept in circles and eddies from all directions at once. They started a fire, but its feeble flame was so blown hither and thither that by the time a kettle of snow was melted and the ice was thawed from their stew, their supply of wood was

so depleted that they dared not use more. So they ate their scanty supper without tea, fed the dogs on frozen porridge, and, huddling together for warmth during the long hours of bleak darkness, were thankful enough to welcome the gray dawn that brought them to an end.

For three days more they toiled over the terrible plateau, driven to long détours by insurmountable obstacles, buffeted and lashed by fierce snow-squalls and ice-laden gales, but ever pushing onward with unabated courage, expecting with each hour to find themselves descending into the valley of the Chilkat River. Two of the dogs driven by Serge broke down so completely that they were mercifully shot. The third dog was added to Jalap Coombs's team, and the load was divided between the remaining sledges, while the now useless one was used as firewood. After that Phil plodded on in advance, and Serge drove the leading team.

The fourth day of this terrible work was one of leaden clouds and bitter winds. The members of the little party were growing desperate with cold, exhaustion, and hunger. Their wanderings had not brought them to a timber-line, and as poor Phil faced the blast with bowed head and chattering teeth it seemed to him that to be once more thoroughly warm would be the perfection of human happiness.

It was already growing dusk, and he was anxiously casting about for the sorry shelter of some bowlder behind which they might shiver away the hours of darkness, when he came to the verge of a steep declivity. His heart leaped as he glanced down its precipitous face; for, far below, he saw a dark mass that he knew must be timber. They could not descend at that point; but he thought he saw one that appeared more favorable a little farther on, and hastened in that

direction. He was already some distance ahead of the slow-moving sledges, and meant to wait for them as soon as he discovered a place from which the descent could be made.

Suddenly a whirling, blinding cloud of snow swept down on him with such fury that to face it and breathe was impossible. Thinking it but a squall, he turned his back and stood motionless, waiting for it to pass over. Instead of so doing, it momentarily increased in violence and density. A sudden darkness came with the storm, and as he anxiously started back to meet the sledges he could not see one rod before him. He began to shout, and in a few minutes had the satisfaction of hearing an answering cry. Directly afterwards Serge loomed through the driving cloud, urging on his reluctant dogs with voice and whip. The moment they were allowed to stop, Musky, Luvtuk, and big Amook lay down as though completely exhausted.

"We can't go a step farther, Phil! We must make camp at once," panted Serge. "This storm is a regular *poorga*, and will probably last all night."

"But where can we camp?" asked Phil, in dismay. "There is timber down below, but it looks miles away, and we can't get to it now."

"No," replied Serge; "we must stay where we are, and burrow a hole in this drift big enough to hold us. We've got to do it in a hurry, too."

So saying, Serge drew his knife, for the outside of the drift close to which they were halted was so hard packed as to render cutting necessary, and outlined a low opening. From this he removed an unbroken slab, and then began to dig furiously in the soft snow beyond.

In the meantime Phil was wondering why Jalap Coombs did not appear, for he had supposed him to

be close behind Serge; but now his repeated shoutings gained no reply.

"He was not more than one hundred feet behind me when the storm began," said Serge, whose anxiety caused him to pause in his labor, though it was for the preservation of their lives.

"He must be in some trouble," said Phil, "and I am going back to find him."

"You can't go alone!" said Serge. "If you are to get lost I must go with you."

"No. One of us must stay here with Nel-te, and it is my duty to go; but do you shout every few seconds, and I promise not to go beyond sound of your voice."

Thus saying, Phil started back, and was instantly swallowed in the vortex of the blizzard. Faithfully did Serge shout, and faithfully did Phil answer, for nearly fifteen minutes. Then the latter came staggering back, with horror-stricken face and voice.

"I can't find him, Serge! Oh, I can't find him!" he cried. "I am afraid he has gone over the precipice. If he has, it is my fault, and I shall never forgive myself, for I had no business to go so far ahead and let the party get scattered."

Serge answered not a word, but fell with desperate energy to the excavating of his snow-house. His heart was near breaking with the sorrow that had overtaken them, but he was determined that no other lives should be lost if his efforts could save them. The excavation was soon so large that Phil could work with him, but with all their furious digging they secured a shelter from the pitiless *poorga* none too soon. The sledge was already buried from sight, and poor little Nel-te was wellnigh smothered ere they lifted him from it and pulled him into the burrow.

CHAPTER XXXIV

COASTING FIVE MILES IN FIVE MINUTES

IN spite of their faintness and weakness from hunger and exhaustion, Phil and Serge were so stimulated by the emergency that within half an hour they had dug a cavity in the great drift sufficiently large to hold the three dogs as well as themselves. The excavation was driven straight for a few feet, and then turned to one side, where it was so enlarged that they could either lie down or sit up. Into this diminutive chamber they dragged their robes and sleeping-bags. The shivering dogs crept in and curled up at their feet. The sledge was left outside, and the opening was closed as well as might be by the slab of compacted snow that had been cut from it.

Poor little Nel-te, who was numbed and whimpering with cold and hunger, was rubbed into a glow, comforted, and petted, until at length he fell asleep, nestled between the lads, and then they found time to talk over their situation. For a while they had no thought save for the dear friend and trusty comrade who, alive or dead, was still out in that terrible storm, and, as they believed, lost to them forever.

"I don't suppose there is the faintest hope of ever seeing him again," said Phil. "If he went over the precipice he must have been killed, and is buried deep in the snow by this time. Even if he did not, and is still wandering somewhere in this vicinity, he must perish before morning. Oh, Serge, can't we do any-

thing for him? It makes me feel like a cowardly traitor to be sitting here in comfort while the dear old chap may be close at hand, and perishing for want of our help. And it is my fault, too! The fault of my inexcusable carelessness. It seems, old man, as if I should go crazy with thinking of it."

"But you mustn't think of it in that way, Phil," answered Serge, soothingly. "As leader of the party it was your duty to go ahead and pick out the road, while it was ours to keep you in sight. If either of us is to blame for what has happened, I am the one. I should have looked back oftener, and made sure that he was still close behind me. Now there is nothing we can do except wait for daylight and the end of the storm. We have our parents, this child, and ourselves to think of first. Nor could we accomplish anything even if we tried. The storm has doubled in fury since we halted. A foot of snow must already have fallen, and to venture a single rod outside of this place would serve to lose us as certainly as though we went a mile. We mustn't give up all hope, though. Mr. Coombs is very strong, and well used to exposure. Of course, if he has gone over the precipice there is little chance that we shall ever see him again; but if he escaped it, and has made a burrow for himself like this one, he will pull through all right, and we shall find him in the morning."

"Why haven't we dug places like this before?" asked Phil. "It is actually getting warm and comfortable in here. We might have had just such a warm cave every night that we have been in the mountains and spent so miserably."

"Of course we might," agreed Serge, "and we would have had but for my stupidity in not thinking of it sooner. While I never took refuge in one before, I have often heard of them, and ought to have remem-

bered. I didn't, though, until this storm struck us, and I knew that without shelter we must certainly perish."

"If you hadn't thought of a snow-burrow," said Phil, "it is certain I never should. It is snug, though, and if only poor Jalap were with us, and we had food and a light of some kind, I wouldn't ask for a better shelter. I can understand now how an Eskimo stone lamp, with seal-oil for fuel and a wick of moss, can give out all the heat that is needed in one of their snow-huts, and I only wish we had brought one with us."

After this the boys grew drowsy, their conversation slackened, and soon all their troubles were forgotten in sleep. Outside, through the long hours, the gale roared and shrieked with impotent rage at their escape from its clutches. It hurled its snow legions against their place of refuge until it was deep buried, and then in a frenzy tore away and scattered the drifted accumulation, until it could once more beat directly upon their slender wall of defence. But its wiles and its furious attacks were alike in vain, and at length its fierce ravings sank into whispers. The *poorga* spent its force with the darkness, and at daylight had swept on to inland fields, leaving only an added burden of a million tons of snow to mark its passage across the mountains.

When the boys awoke a soft white light was filtering through one side of their spotless chamber, and they knew that day had come. They expected to dig their way to the outer air through a great mass of snow, and were agreeably surprised to find only a small drift against the doorway. As they emerged from it they were for a few minutes blinded by the marvellous brilliancy of their sunlit surroundings. Gradually becoming accustomed to the intense light, they gazed eagerly about for some sign of their miss-

ing comrade, but there was none. They followed back for a mile over the way they had come the evening before, shouting and firing their guns, but without avail.

No answering shout came back to their straining ears, and there was nothing to indicate the fate of the lost man. Sadly and soberly the lads retraced their steps, and prepared to resume their journey. To remain longer in that place meant starvation and death. To save themselves they must push on.

They shuddered at the precipice they had escaped, and over which they feared their comrade had plunged. At its foot lay a valley, which, though it trended westward, and so away from their course, Phil determined to follow; for, far below their lofty perch, and still miles away from where they stood, it held the dark mass he had seen the night before, and knew to be timber. Besides, his sole desire at that moment was to escape from those awful heights and reach the coast at some point; he hardly cared whether it were inhabited or not.

So the sledge was dug from its bed of snow, reloaded, and the dogs were harnessed. Poor little Nel-te, crying with hunger, was slipped into his fur travelling-bag, and a start was made to search for some point of descent. At length they found a place where the slope reached to the very top of the cliff, but so sharply that it was like the steep roof of a house several miles in length.

“I hate the looks of it,” said Phil, “but as there doesn’t seem to be any other way, I suppose we’ve got to try it. I should say that for at least three miles it is as steep as the steepest part of a toboggan-slide, though, and I’m pretty certain we sha’n’t care to try it more than once.”

“I guess we can do it all right,” replied Serge,

“but there’s only one way, and that is to sit on a snow-shoe and slide. We couldn’t keep on our feet a single second.”

They lifted Nel-te, fur bag and all, from the sledge, tightened the lashings of its load, which included the guns and extra snow-shoes, and started it over the verge. It flashed down the declivity like a rocket, and the last they saw of it it was rolling over and over.

“Looks cheerful, doesn’t it?” said Phil, grimly. “Now I’ll go ; then do you start the dogs down, and come yourself as quick as you please.”

Thus saying, the plucky lad seated himself on a snow-shoe, took Nel-te, still in the fur bag, in his lap, and launched himself over the edge of the cliff. For a moment the sensation, which was that of falling from a great height, was sickening, and a thick mist seemed to obscure his vision. Then it cleared away, and was followed by a feeling of the wildest exhilaration as he heard the whistling backward rush of air, and realized the tremendous speed at which he was whizzing through space. Ere it seemed possible that he could have gone half-way to the timber-line, trees began to fly past him, and he knew that the worst was over. In another minute he was floundering in a drift of soft snow, into which he had plunged up to his neck, and the perilous feat was accomplished.

Poor Serge arrived at the same point shortly afterwards, head first, and dove out of sight in the drift ; but fortunately Phil was in a position to extricate him before he smothered. The dogs appeared a moment later, with somewhat less velocity, but badly demoralized, and evidently feeling that they had been sadly ill-treated. So the sledge party had safely descended in five minutes a distance equal to that which they had spent half a day and infinite toil in ascending on the other side of the mountains.

When Nel-te was released from the fur bag and set on his feet he was as calm and self-possessed as though nothing out of the usual had happened, and immediately demanded something to eat.

After a long search they discovered the sledge, with only one rail broken and its load intact.

“Now for a fire and breakfast!” cried Phil, heading towards the timber as soon as the original order of things was restored. “After that we will make one more effort to find some trace of poor Jalap, though I don’t believe there is the slightest chance of success.”

They entered the forest of wide-spreading but stunted evergreens, and Phil, axe in hand, was vigorously attacking a dead spruce, when an exclamation from his companion caused him to pause in his labor and look around.

“What can that be?” asked Serge, pointing to a thick hemlock that stood but a few yards from them. The lower ends of its drooping branches were deep buried in snow, but such part as was still visible was in a strange state of agitation.

“It must be a bear,” replied Phil, dropping his axe and springing to the sledge for his rifle. “His winter den is in there, and we have disturbed him. Get out your gun—quick! We can’t afford to lose him. Meat’s too scarce in camp just now.”

Even as he spoke, and before the guns could be taken from their moose-skin cases, the motion of the branches increased, there came a violent upheaval of the snow that weighted them down, and the boys caught a glimpse of some huge shaggy animal issuing from the powdered whiteness.

“Hurry!” cried Phil. “No, look out! We’re too late! What? Great Scott! It can’t be! Yes, it is! Hurrah! Glory, hallelujah! I knew he’d pull through

all right, and I believe I'm the very happiest fellow in all the world at this minute."

"Mebbe you be, son," remarked Jalap Coombs, "and then again mebbe there's others as is equally joyful. As my old friend Kite Roberson useter say, 'A receiver's as good as a thief,' and I sartainly received a heap of pleasure through hearing you holler jest now."

CHAPTER XXXV

HOW JALAP COOMBS MADE PORT

THE things on which we are apt to set the highest value in this world are those that we have lost, and even our friends are as a rule most highly appreciated after they have been taken from us. Thus, in the present instance, Phil and Serge had so sincerely mourned the loss of their quaint but loyal comrade that his restoration to them alive and well, "heartly *and* hungry," as he himself expressed it, filled them with unbounded joy. They hung about him, and lovingly brushed the snow from his fur clothing, and plied him with questions, and made so much of him that he finally exclaimed:

"Avast, lads, and let up! Ye make me feel like I were reading my own obituary in print, which my old friend Kite Roberson were the only mortal man ever I knowed as had that onhappy pleasure. It happened when he were lost at sea, with his ship and all hands, in latitood 24.06 nothe, and longitood 140.15 west, 'cording to the noosepapers; while, 'cording to Kite's log, he were cutting in of a fin-back and having the best of luck at that very place *and* hour. Anyway, whether he were drowned or no, he kim back in time to enjoy the mortification of reading the notice of his own taking off, which he said it made him feel ashamed to be alive, seeing as he were a so much better man after he were dead. Them's about the size of my feelings at the present hour of observation. So ef you

boys don't let up I reckon I'll have to crawl back in the snow *and* stay there."

Even Nel-te showed delight at the return of his playmate by cuddling up to him, and stroking his weather-beaten cheeks, and confiding to him how very hungry he was.

"Me, too, Cap'n Kid!" exclaimed Jalap Coombs; "and I must say you're a mighty tempting mossel to a man as nigh starved as I be. Jest about broiling age, plump *and* tender. Cap'n Kid, look out, for I'm mighty inclined to stow ye away."

"Try this instead," laughed Phil, holding out a chunk of frozen pemmican that he had just chopped off. "We're in the biggest kind of luck to-day," he continued. "I didn't know there was a mouthful of anything to eat on this sledge, and here I've just found about five pounds of pemmican. It does seem to me the very best pemmican that ever was put up, too, and I only wonder that we didn't eat it long ago. I'm going to get my aunt Ruth to make me a lot of it just as soon as ever I get home."

By this time the fire was blazing merrily, and the chynik was beginning to sing. Musky, Luvtuk, and big Amook had each received a portion of the precious pemmican, swallowed it at a gulp, and were wagging their bushy tails in anxious expectation of more, while the spirits of the whole party were at the top-notch of contentment.

As they sat before the fire on a tree felled and stripped of its branches for the purpose, and munched frozen pemmican, and took turns in sipping strong unsweetened tea from the only cup now left to them, Jalap Coombs described his thrilling experiences of the preceding night.

According to his story, one of his dogs gave out, and he stopped to unharness it with the hope that it would

still have strength to follow the sledge. While he was thus engaged the storm broke, the blinding rush of snow swept over the mountains, and as he looked up he found to his dismay that the other sledge was already lost to view. He at once started to overtake it, urging on the reluctant dogs by every means in his power; but after a few minutes of struggle against the furious gale, they lay down and refused to move. After cutting their traces that they might follow him if they chose, the man set forth alone, with bowed head and uncertain steps, on a hopeless quest for his comrades. He did not find them, as we know, though once he heard a faint cry from off to one side. Heading in that direction, the next thing he knew he had plunged over the precipice, and found himself sliding, rolling, and bounding downward with incredible velocity.

“The trip must have lasted an hour or more,” said Jalap Coombs, soberly, in describing it, “and when I finally brung up all standing, I couldn’t make out for quite a spell whether I were still on top of the earth or had gone plumb through to the other side. I knowed every rib and timber of my framing were broke, and every plank started; but somehow I managed to keep my head above water, and struck out for shore. I made port under a tree, and went to sleep. When I woke at the end of the watch, I found all hatches closed and battened down. So I were jest turning over again when I heerd a hail, and knowed I were wanted on deck. And, boys, I’ve had happy moments in my life, but I reckon the happiest of ’em all were when I broke out and seen you two, with the kid, standing quiet *and* respectful, and heerd ye saying, ‘Good morning, sir, and hoping you’ve passed a quiet night,’ like I were a full-rigged cap’n.”

“As you certainly deserve to be, Mr. Coombs,” laughed Phil, “and as I believe you will be before

long, for I don't think we can be very far from salt water at this moment."

"It's been seeming to me that I could smell it!" exclaimed the sailor-man, eagerly sniffing the air as he spoke. "And, ef you're agreeable, sir, I moves that we set sail for it at once. My hull's pretty well battered and stove in, but top works is solid, standing and running rigging all right, and I reckon by steady pumping we can navigate the old craft to port yet."

"All aboard, then! Up anchor, and let's be off!" shouted Phil, so excited at the prospect of a speedy termination to their journey that he could not bear a moment's longer delay in attaining it. At present he cared little that they had evidently wandered far from the Chilkat trail, as was shown by the westward trend of the valley in which they now found themselves. That it still descended sharply, and by following it they must eventually reach the ocean, was enough.

So they set merrily and hopefully forth, and followed the windings of the valley, keeping just beyond the forest edge. In summer-time they would have found it filled with impassable obstacles—huge bowlders, landslides, a net-work of logs and fallen trees, and a roaring torrent; but now it was packed with snow to such an incredible depth that all these things lay far beneath their feet, and the way was made easy.

By nightfall they had reached the mouth of the valley, and saw, opening before them, one so much wider that it reminded them of the broad expanse of the frozen Yukon. The course of this new valley was almost north and south, and they felt certain that it must lead to the sea. In spite of their anxiety to follow it, darkness compelled them to seek a camping-place in the timber. That evening they ate all that remained of their pemmican, excepting a small bit that was reserved for Nel-te's breakfast.

They made up, as far as possible, for their lack of food by building the most gorgeous camp-fire of the entire journey. They felled several green trees close together, and built it on them so that it should not melt its way down out of sight through the deep snow. Then they felled dead trees and cut them into logs. These, together with dead branches, they piled up, until they had a structure forty feet long by ten feet high. They set fire to it with the last match in their possession, and as the flames gathered headway and roared and leaped to the very tops of the surrounding trees, even Phil was obliged to acknowledge that at last he was thoroughly and uncomfortably warm. The contrast between that night and the previous one, passed in a snow burrow high up on the mountains, amid the howlings of a furious gale, without food, fire, or hope, was so wonderful that all declared they had lived months since that dreadful time instead of only a few hours.

The following morning poor Jalap was so stiff and lame that his face was contorted with pain when he attempted to rise.

"Never mind," he cried, cheerily, as he noted Phil's anxious expression, "I'll fetch it. Just give me a few minutes' leeway."

And, sure enough, in a few minutes he was on his feet rubbing his legs, stretching his arms, and twisting his body "to limber up the j'int's." Although in a torment of pain, he soon declared himself ready for the day's tramp, and they set forth. Ere they had gone half a mile, however, it was evident that he could walk no farther. The pain of the effort was too great even for his sturdy determination, and when he finally sank down with a groan, the boys helped him on the sledge, and attached themselves to its pulling-bar with long thongs of rawhide.

The two stalwart young fellows, together with three dogs, made a strong team, but the snow was so soft, and their load so heavy, that by noon they had not made more than ten miles. They had, however, reached the end of their second valley, and come upon a most extraordinary scene. As far as the eye could reach on either side stretched a vast plain of frozen whiteness. On its farther border, directly in front of them, but some ten miles away, rose a chain of mountains bisected by a deep, wide cut like a gateway.

"It must be an arm of the sea, frozen over and covered with snow," said Phil.

"But," objected Serge, "on this coast no such body of salt water stays frozen so late in the season; for we are well into April now, you know."

"Then it is a great lake."

"I never heard of any lake on this side of the mountains."

"I don't reckon it's the sea; but salt water's mighty nigh," said Jalap Coombs, sniffing the air as eagerly as a hound on the scent of game.

"Whatever it is," said Phil, "we've got to cross it, and I am going to head straight for that opening."

So they again bent to their traces, and a few hours later had crossed the great white plain, and were skirting the base of a mountain that rose on their left. Its splintered crags showed the dull red of iron rust wherever they were bare of snow, and only thin fringes of snow were to be seen in its more sheltered gorges.

Suddenly Phil halted, his face paled, and his lips quivered with emotion. "The sea!" he gasped. "Over there, Serge!"

Jalap Coombs caught the words and was on his feet in an instant, all his pains forgotten in a desire to once more catch a glimpse of his beloved salt water.

"Yes," replied Serge, after a long look. "It cer-

tainly is a narrow bay. How I wish we knew what one! But, Phil! what is that down there near the foot of the cliffs? Is it—can it be—a house?”

“Where?” cried Phil. “Yes, I see! I do believe it is! Yes, it certainly is a house.”

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE MOST FAMOUS ALASKAN GLACIER

THAT little house nestling at the base of a precipitous mountain, and still nearly a mile away, was just then a more fascinating sight to our half-starved, toil-worn travellers than even the sea itself, and, filled with a hopeful excitement, they hastened towards it. The way led down a steep incline, and along a shallow, treeless valley, shut off from the water on their right by a ridge a hundred feet or so in height. From this depression the house was hidden until they were directly upon it; but the knowledge that it was there filled them with cheerful anticipations of food, warmth, rest, and a hearty welcome from people of their own race. It was probably a salmon cannery or saltery, or a trading-post. At any rate, the one house they had discovered was that of a white man; for it had a chimney, and none of the Tlingits or natives of southern Alaska build chimneys.

While Phil and Jalap Coombs were full of confidence that a few minutes more would find them in a settlement of white men, Serge was greatly puzzled, and, though he said little, kept up a deal of thinking as he tugged at the rawhide sledge-trace. He felt that he ought to know the place, for he did not believe they were more than one hundred miles from Sitka; but he could not remember having heard of any white settlement on that part of the coast, except at the Chilkat

cannery, and this place did not correspond in any particular with what he had heard of that.

At length they rounded the last low spur of the ridge, and came upon the house only a few rods away. For a few moments they stood motionless, regarding it in silence, and with a bitter disappointment. It was roughly but substantially constructed of sawed lumber, had a shingled roof, two glass windows, a heavy door, and a great outside chimney of rough stone. But it was closed and deserted. No hospitable smoke curled from its chimney, there was no voice of welcome nor sign of human presence. Nor was there another building of any kind in sight. The little cabin in the now distant wilderness from which Phil had taken Nel-te had not been more lonely than this one.

"I suppose we may as well keep on and examine the interior now that we've come so far," said Phil, in a disgusted tone that readily betrayed his feelings. "There doesn't seem to be any one around to prevent us. I only wish there was."

So they pushed open the door, which was fastened but not locked, and stepped inside. The cabin contained but a single large room furnished with several sleeping-bunks, a stout table, and a number of seats, all home-made from unplanned lumber. Much rubbish, including empty bottles and tin cans, was scattered about; but it was evident that everything of value had been removed by the last occupants. The chief feature of the room was an immense and rudely artistic fireplace at its farther end. Above this hung a smooth board skilfully decorated with charcoal sketches, and bearing the legend "Camp Muir."

As Serge caught sight of this he uttered an exclamation. "Now I know where we are!" he cried. "Come with me, Phil, and I will show you one of the grand sights of the world."

With this he dashed out of the door, and ran towards the beach ridge behind which the cabin stood. Phil followed, wondering curiously what his friend could mean. As they reached the low crest of the ridge he understood; for outspread before him, bathed in a rosy light by the setting sun, was a spectacle that tourists travel from all parts of the world to gaze upon.

A precipitous line of ice-cliffs of marble whiteness or heavenly blue, two miles long and hundreds of feet in height, carved into spires, pinnacles, minarets, and a thousand other fantastic shapes, rose in frozen majesty at the head of a little bay whose waters washed the beach at their feet. Ere either of the boys could find words to express his delight and wonder, a huge mass of the lofty wall broke away and plunged into the sea, with a thunderous roar that echoed and re-echoed from the enclosing mountains. For a moment it disappeared in a milky cloud of foam and spray. Then it shot up from the depths like some stupendous submarine monster, and, with torrents of water streaming from it in glittering cascades, floated on the heaving surface a new-born iceberg.

"It must be a glacier," said Phil, in an awe-stricken tone.

"It is a glacier," answered Serge, triumphantly, "and one of the most famous in the world, for it is the MUIR, which is larger and contains more ice than all the eleven hundred glaciers of Switzerland put together. That cabin is the one occupied by John Muir and his companions when they explored it in 1890. To think that we should have come down one of its branches, and even crossed the great glacier itself, without knowing what it was! I believe we would have known it, though, if the snow hadn't been so deep as to alter the whole character of its surface."

"If this is the Muir Glacier," reflected Phil, "I

don't see but what we are in a box. We must be to the westward of Chilkat."

"Yes," said Serge. "It lies to the eastward of those mountains."

"Which don't look as though they would be very easy even for us to climb, while I know we couldn't get Jalap and Nel-te over them. I don't suppose any tourist steamers will be visiting this place for some time, either."

"Not for two months at least," replied Serge.

"Which is longer than we can afford to wait without provisions or supplies of any kind. So we shall have to get away, somehow, and pretty quickly too. It doesn't look as though we could follow the coast any farther, though; for just below here the cliffs seem to rise sheer from the water."

"No," said Serge, "we can't. We can only get out by boat or by scaling the mountains."

"In which case we shall starve to death before we have a chance to do either," retorted Phil, gloomily, "for we are pretty nearly starved now. In fact, old man, it looks as though the good-fortune that has stood by us during the whole of this journey had deserted us at its very end."

By this time the boys had strolled back to the cabin, which was left by the setting sun in a dark shadow. As they turned its corner they came upon Nel-te standing outside clapping his chubby hands, and gazing upward in an ecstasy of delight. Following the child's glance Phil uttered a startled exclamation, and sprang through the doorway. A moment later he emerged, rifle in hand.

High up on a shoulder of the mountain, hundreds of feet above the cabin, sharply outlined against the sky, and bathed in the full glory of the setting sun, a mountain goat, with immensely thick hair of snowy white,

and sharp black horns, stood as motionless as though carved from marble. Blinded by the sunlight, and believing himself to be surrounded by a solitude untenanted by enemies, he saw not the quietly moving figures in the dim shadows beneath him.

Twice did Phil raise his rifle and twice did he lower it, so tremulous was he with excitement and a knowledge that four human lives depended on the result of his shot. The third time he took a quick aim and fired. As the report echoed sharply from the beetling cliffs, the stricken animal gave a mighty leap straight out into space, and came whirling downward like a great white bird with broken wings. He struck twice, but bounded off each time, and finally lay motionless, buried in the snow at the very foot of the mountain that had been his home.

"Hurrah!" shouted Phil. "No starvation this time! Luck is still with us, after all. That is, Nel-te is still with us, and he seems to carry good luck; for we certainly should not have seen that fellow but for the little chap. So, hurrah, old man!"

But Serge needed no urging this time to shout as loudly as Phil, though while he shouted he got the sledge ready for bringing in their game.

"Seeing as how we hain't got no fire nor no matches, I reckon we'll eat our meat raw, like the Huskies," said Jalap Coombs, dryly, a little later, as they began to skin and cut up the goat.

"Whew!" ejaculated Phil. "I never thought of that. But I know how to make a fire with the powder from a cartridge, if one of you can furnish a bit of cotton cloth."

"It seems a pity to waste a cartridge," said Serge, "when we haven't but three or four left, and a single one has just done so much for us. I think I can get fire in a much more economical way."

“How?” queried Phil.

“Ye won’t find no brimstone nor yet feathers here,” suggested Jalap Coombs, with a shake of his head.

“Never mind,” laughed Serge; “you two keep on cutting up the goat, and by the time your job is completed I think I can promise that mine will be.” So saying, Serge entered the cabin and closed the door.

In a pile of rubbish he had noticed several small pieces of wood and a quantity of very dry botanical specimens, some of which bore fluffy seed-vessels that could be used as tinder. He selected a bit of soft pine, and worked a small hole in it with the point of his knife. Next he whittled out a thick pencil of the hardest wood he could find, sharpened one end and rounded the other. In a block of hard wood he dug a cavity, into which the rounded top of the pencil would fit. He found a section of barrel hoop, and strung it very loosely with a length of rawhide from a dog harness, so as to make a small bow. Finally he took a turn of the bow-string about the pencil, fitted the point into the soft pine that rested on the floor, and the other end into the hard-wood block, on which he leaned his breast.

With one hand he now drew the bow swiftly to and fro, causing the pencil to revolve with great rapidity, and with the other he held a small quantity of tinder close to its point of contact with the soft pine. The rapid movement of the pencil produced a few grains of fine sawdust, and this shortly began to smoke with the heat of friction. In less than one minute the sawdust and tinder were in a glow that a breath fanned into a flame, and there was no longer any doubt about a fire.*

*This is the Eskimo method; and I have seen a Norton Sound Eskimo woman obtain fire by this simple means inside of ten seconds.—K. M.



SERGE'S METHOD OF LIGHTING A FIRE

That evening, as our friends sat contentedly in front of a cheerful blaze, after a more satisfactory meal than they had enjoyed for many a day, Jalap Coombs remarked that he only wanted one more thing to make him perfectly happy.

"Same here," said Phil. "What's your want?"

"A pipeful of tobacco," replied the sailor, whose whole smoking outfit had been lost with his sledge.

"All I want," laughed Phil, "is to know how and when we are to get out of this trap, and continue our journey to Sitka. I hate the thought of spending a couple of months here, even if there are plenty of goats."

"I can't think of anything else we can do," said Serge, thoughtfully.

And yet those who were to rescue them from their perplexing situation were within five miles of them at that very moment.

CHAPTER XXXVII

BIG AMOOK AND THE CHILKAT HUNTERS

"A GOAT is a good thing so far as it goes," remarked Phil, gravely, "but one goat divided among one man, two boys, a little chap, and three awfully hungry dogs isn't likely to last very long. With plenty of goats ready to come and be killed as we wanted them we might hold out here, after a fashion, until the arrival of a tourist steamer. Wouldn't that be fun, though? And wouldn't we astonish the tourists? But how we should hate goat by that time! Still, I don't think there is the slightest chance of our having that experience, for I understand that mountain goats are among the shyest and most difficult to kill of all wild animals."

"That's right," said Serge, "and your chance for that shot was one of the luckiest things I ever heard of. You might hunt goats for years, and not have it happen again."

"Which being the case," continued Phil, "it won't do for us to live as though we had goats to squander. Consequently, we must make an effort to get out of here before our provision is exhausted. As we have no boat in which to go to Sitka, and the nearest point at which we can obtain one is Chilkat, that is the place we have got to reach somehow. So I propose that Serge and I take a prospecting trip into the mountains to-morrow, and see what chance there is for our crossing them. We will be back by dark, and, with the

knowledge thus gained, perhaps we can decide to-morrow evening what is best to be done."

As no better plan than this was offered, Phil and Serge started early the following morning on their tedious climb. Each carried a gun, and they took Musky and Luvtuk with them in the hope of getting a bear, as Serge had heard that bears were plentiful in those mountains. Nel-te was left to take care of the hospital, in which Jalap Coombs, with his many aches, and Amook, with his cut feet, were the patients.

That afternoon was so warm that the door of the little cabin stood wide open. Before a fire that smouldered on the broad hearth Jalap Coombs dozed in a big chair, while Nel-te romped with Amook on the floor. Now the little chap was tantalizing the dog with the fur-seal's tooth, which, still attached to its buckskin thong, he had taken from his neck. He would dangle it close to Amook's nose, and when the dog snapped at it snatch it away with a shout of laughter.

While the occupants of the cabin were thus engaged the heads of several Indians were suddenly but cautiously lifted above the beach ridge. After making certain that no one was in the vicinity of the house, one of their number swiftly but noiselessly approached it. Crouching under a side wall, he slowly raised his head. A single glance seemed to satisfy him, for he immediately began to retrace his steps as quietly as he had come.

This Indian was one of a party of Chilkat hunters who had come to Glacier Bay in pursuit of hair seals, which in the early spring delight to float lazily about on the drifting ice-cakes. They had camped at the mouth of Muir Inlet the night before, and during the day had slowly hunted their way almost to the foot of

the great glacier. While there they discovered a thin spiral of smoke curling from the cabin chimney. This so aroused their curiosity that they determined to investigate its cause. They imagined that some of the interior Indians, who were strictly forbidden by the Chilkats to visit the coast, had disobeyed orders, and come to this unfrequented place to surreptitiously gather in a few seals. In that case the hunters would immediately declare war, and the prospect of scalps caused their stolid faces to light and their dull eyes to glitter.

When it was discovered that a white man was in the cabin, the Indians were greatly disappointed, but concluded to withdraw without allowing him to suspect their presence, for the Chilkats have no love for white men. But for Nel-te and Amook they would have succeeded in this, and our travellers would never have known of their dusky visitors, or the chance for escape offered by their canoes.

If the fur-seal's tooth had been able to speak just then it would have said, "I am disgusted with the ways of white people. In their hands I am treated with no respect. They lose me and find me again with indifference. They even give me to children and dogs as a plaything. How different was my position among the noble Chilkats! By their Shamans and chiefs I was venerated; by the common people I was feared; while all recognized my extraordinary powers. To them I am determined to return."

With this the fur-seal's tooth, which was at that moment dangling from Nel-te's hand, gave itself such a vigorous forward swing that Amook was able to seize the buckskin thong, which immediately slipped into a secure place between two of his sharp teeth. As Nel-te attempted to snatch back his plaything, the dog sprang up and darted from the open doorway.

At that moment the Indian who had inspected the cabin was just disappearing over the beach ridge. At sight of him Amook uttered a yelp, and started in pursuit. The Indian heard him, and ran. He sprang into the canoe, already occupied by his fellows, and shoved it off as Amook, barking furiously, gained the water's edge. Lying a few feet away, and resting on their paddles, the Indians taunted him. Suddenly one of their number called attention to the curious white object dangling from the dog's mouth. They gazed at it with ever-increasing excitement, and finally one of them began to load his gun with the intention of shooting the dog, and so securing the coveted trophy that so miraculously appeared hanging from his jaws. Ere he could carry out his cruel intention little Nel-te appeared over the ridge in hot pursuit of his playmate. Without paying the slightest heed to the Indians, he ran to the dog, disengaged the buckskin thong from his teeth, slipped it over his own head, tucked the tooth carefully inside his little parka, and started back towards the cabin. Amook followed him, while the Indians regarded the whole transaction with blank amazement.

Both Nel-te and Amook regained the cabin, and were engaged in another romp on its floor before Jalap Coombs awoke from his nap. A little later, when he was surprised by the appearance of half a dozen Indians before the door, he thrust the child and dog behind him, and standing in the opening, axe in hand, boldly faced the new-comers. In vain did they talk, shout, point to Nel-te, and gesticulate. The only idea they conveyed to the sailor-man was that they had come to carry "Cap'n Kid" back to the wilderness.

"Which ye sha'n't have him, ye bloody pirates! Not so long as old Jalap can swing an axe!" he cried, at length wearied of their vociferations and slamming the door in their faces.

In spite of this the Indians were so determined to attain their object that they were planning for an attack on the cabin, when all at once there came a barking of other dogs, and, looking in that direction, they saw two more white men, armed with guns, coming rapidly towards them.

“Hello in the house! Are you safe? What is the meaning of all this?” cried Phil, in front of the closed door.

“Aye, aye, sir!” replied Jalap Coombs, joyfully, flinging it open. “We’re safe enough so far; but them black swabs overhauled us awhile ago, and gave out as how they’d got to have Cap’n Kid. I double-shotted the guns, stationed the crew at quarters, and returned reply that they couldn’t have him. Then they run up the black flag and allowed they’d blow the ship out of water. With that I declined to hold further communication, cleared for action, and prepared to repel boarders.”

In the meantime Serge was talking to the natives in Chinook jargon. Suddenly he exclaimed:

“They are Chilkats, Phil, and they want something that they seem to think is in Nel-te’s possession.”

“In Nel-te’s possession?” repeated Phil, in a puzzled tone. “What can they mean? I don’t see how they can know anything about Nel-te, anyway. They can’t mean the fur-seal’s tooth, can they?”

“That is exactly what they do mean!” replied Serge, after asking the natives a few more questions. “They say it is hanging about his neck, inside of his parka.”

“How long have these people been here, Mr. Coombs?” queried Phil.

“Not more ’n ten minutes.”

“Have they seen Nel-te?”

“No, for he hain’t been outside the door.”

JUNEAU CITY, ALASKA



“Could they have seen him at any time during the day?”

“Not without me knowing it; for he hain’t left my side sence you boys went away.”

“Then it is more certain than ever that there is magic connected with the fur-seal’s tooth, and that the Chilkats are in some way involved in it. How else could they possibly have known that it was in our possession, just where to find us, and, above all, the exact position of the tooth at this moment?”

“It surely does look redicerlous,” meditated Jalap Coombs; while Serge said he was glad Phil was becoming so reasonable and willing to see things in a true light.

“How did these fellows get here?” asked Phil.

“They say they came in canoes,” replied Serge.

“Ask them if they will take us to Sitka, provided we will give them the fur-seal’s tooth?”

“No; the Indians could not do that.”

“Will they give us a canoe in exchange for it?”

“They say they will,” replied Serge, “if we will go with them to their village and allow their Shaman (medicine-man) to examine the tooth, and see whether or not it is the genuine article.”

“Won’t that be awfully out of our way?”

“Yes, I should think about seventy-five miles; but then we may find a steamer there that will take us to Juneau, or even to Sitka itself.”

“It would certainly be better than staying here,” reflected Phil. “And I know that neither Serge nor I wants to try the mountain trail again after what we have seen to-day. So I vote for going to Chilkat.”

“So do I,” assented Serge.

“Same here,” said Jalap Coombs; “though ef anybody had told me half an hour ago that I’d been shipping for a cruise along with them black pirates before

supper-time, I'd sartainly doubted him. It only goes to prove what my old friend Kite Roberson useter say, which were, 'Them as don't expect nothing is oftenest surprised.' ”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE TREACHEROUS SHAMAN OF KLUKWAN

So delighted were the Chilkat hunters to know that they were to have the honor of conveying the fur-seal's tooth back to their tribe that they wished to start at once. The whites, however, refused to go before morning, and so the Indians returned down the inlet to their camp of the preceding night, where they would cache what seals they had obtained in order to make room in the canoes for their unexpected passengers. They agreed to be back by daylight.

After they were gone, and our travellers had disposed of their simple but highly appreciated meal of goat meat and tea, they gathered about the fire for the last of those "dream-bag talks," as Phil called them, that had formed so pleasant a feature of their long journey. Without saying a word, but with a happy twinkle in his eyes, Jalap Coombs produced a pipe and a small square of tobacco, which he began with great care to cut into shavings.

"Where on earth did you get them?" asked Phil.

"Found the pipe in yonder rubbish," replied the sailor-man; "and Cap'n Kid give me the 'baccy just now."

"Nel-te gave you the tobacco? Where did he get it?"

"Dunno. I were too glad to get it to ask questions."

"Well," said Phil, "the mysteries of this place are beyond finding out."

"This one isn't," laughed Serge; "though I suppose it would be if I hadn't happened to see one of the Indians slip that bit of tobacco into Nel-te's hand."

"What could have been his object in giving such a thing as that to a child?"

"Oh, the Chilkat children use it as well as their elders; and I suppose he wanted to gain Nel-te's goodwill, seeing that he is the guardian of the fur-seal's tooth. I shouldn't be surprised if he hoped in some way to get it from the child before we reached the village."

"Which suggests an idea," said Phil, removing the trinket in question from Nel-te's neck and handing it to Serge. "It is hard to say just who the tooth does belong to now, it has changed hands so frequently, but it will be safer for the next day or two with you than anywhere else. Besides, it is only fair that, as it came directly from the Chilkats to you, or, rather, to your father, you should have the satisfaction of restoring it to them."

So Serge accepted from Phil the mysterious bit of ivory that he had given the latter more than a year before in distant New London, and hung it about his neck.

"Last night," said Phil, after this transfer had taken place, "Mr. Coombs and I only needed a pipeful of tobacco and a knowledge of how we were to escape from here to make us perfectly happy. Now we have both."

"The blamed pipe won't draw," growled Jalap Coombs.

"While I," continued Phil, "am bothered. I know we must go with those fellows, but I don't trust them, and shall feel uneasy so long as we are in their power."

"Do you think," asked Serge, "that these things go to prove that there isn't any such thing in this world as perfect happiness?"

"No," answered Phil; "only that it is extremely rare. How is it with you, old man? Does the approaching end of our journey promise you perfect happiness?"

"No, indeed!" cried Serge, vehemently. "In spite of its hardships, I have enjoyed it too much to be glad that it is nearly ended. But most of all, Phil, is the fear that its end means a parting from you; for I suppose you will go right on to San Francisco, while I must stay behind."

"I'm afraid so," admitted Phil. "But, at any rate, old fellow, this journey has given me one happiness that will last as long as I live, for it has given me your friendship, and taught me to appreciate it at its true worth."

"Thank you, Phil," replied Serge, simply. "I value those words from you more than I should from any one else in the world. Now I want to tell you what I have to thank the journey for besides a friendship. I believe it has shown me what is to be my life-work. You know that missionary at Anvik said he was more in need of teachers than anything else. While I don't know very much, I do know more than those Indian and Eskimo boys, and I did enjoy teaching them. So, if I can get my mother to consent, I am going back to Anvik as soon as I can, and offer my services as a teacher."

"It is perfectly splendid of you to think of it," cried Phil, heartily; "and all I can say is that the boys who get you for a teacher are to be envied."

So late did the lads sit up that night talking over their plans and hopes that on the following morning the Indians had arrived and were clamorous for them to start before they were fairly awake. By sunrise they, together with the three dogs, were embarked in a great long-beaked and marvellously carved Chilkat canoe, hewn from a single cedar log and painted black.

Two of the Indians occupied it with them ; while the others and the sledge went in a second but smaller canoe of the same ungraceful design as the first.

As with sail set and before the brisk north breeze that ever sweeps down the glacier, the canoes sped away among the ice floes and bergs of the inlet, our boys cast many a lingering backward glance at the little cabin that had proved such a haven to them, and at the stupendous ice-wall gleaming in frozen splendor on their horizon. Under other conditions they would gladly have stayed and explored its mysteries. Now they rejoiced at leaving it.

So favoring were the winds that they left Glacier Bay, passed Icy Strait, and headed northward as far as the mouth of Lynn Canal before sunset of that day. During the second day they ran the whole fifty-mile length of the canal, which is the grandest of Alaska's rock-walled fiords, entered Chilkat Inlet, passed the canneries at Pyramid Harbor and Chilkat, which would not be opened until the beginning of the salmon season in June, entered the river, and finally reached Klukwan, the principal Chilkat village.

Here, as the smaller canoe had preceded them and announced their coming, our travellers were welcomed by the entire population of the village. These thronged the beach in a state of the wildest excitement, for it was known to all that the long-lost fur-seal's tooth was at last come back to them. Even the village dogs were there, a legion of snarling, flea-bitten curs. Ere the canoe touched the beach, Musky, Luvtuk, and big Amook were among them, and a battle was in progress that completely drowned the cries of the spectators with its uproar. The fighting was continued, with only brief intervals, throughout the night ; but in the morning the three champions from the Yukon were masters of the situation, and roamed the village with

W. A. Rogers



THEY WERE WELCOMED BY THE ENTIRE POPULATION OF KUKWAN



bushy tails proudly curled over their backs and without interference. "For all the world," said Phil, "like the Three Musketeers."

The guests of the village were escorted to the council-house, to which were also taken their belongings. Here they were supplied with venison, salmon, partridges, and dried berries; and here, after supper, they received many visitors, all anxious for a sight of the magic tooth. Most prominent of these were the head Shaman of the village, and the principal woman of the tribe, whose name was so unpronounceable that Phil called her "The Princess," a title with which she seemed to be well pleased.

She was the widow of Kloh-kutz, most famous of Chilkat chiefs, and the one who had presented the fur-seal's tooth to Serge Belcofsky's father. On the occasion of this visit she wore a beautifully embroidered dress, together with a Chilkat blanket of exquisite fineness thrown over her shoulders like a shawl, and fastened at the throat with a stout safety-pin. The Princess devoted herself to Serge, whom she evidently considered the most important person in the party, and to little Nel-te, who took to her at once. While she pronounced the fur-seal's tooth to be the same that had belonged to her husband, the Shaman shook his head doubtfully. Then it was handed from one to another of a number of lesser Shamans and chiefs for inspection. Suddenly one of these dropped it to the floor, and, when search was made, it could not be found.

Phil was furious at the impudence of this trick. Even Serge was indignant; while Jalap Coombs said it was just what might be expected from land-sharks and pirates.

The Shaman insisted that the tooth was not lost, but had disappeared of its own accord. If it were not the

same fur-seal's tooth that belonged to their tribe in former years, it would not be seen again. If it were, it would appear within a few days attached to a hideously carved representative of Hutle, the thunder-bird that stood in one of Kloh-kutz's houses, now used as a place for incantation.

"We don't care anything about all that!" exclaimed Phil, when this was translated to him. "Tell him he can do as he pleases with the tooth, so long as he gives us the canoe we have bargained for."

To this the Shaman replied that they should surely have a canoe as soon as the tooth proved its genuineness by reappearing. In the meantime, if they were in such a hurry to get away that they did not care to wait, he had a very fine canoe that he would let them have at once in exchange for their guns and their dogs.

"You may tell him that we will wait," replied Phil, grimly, "but you need not tell him what is equally true—that we shall only wait until we find a chance to help ourselves to the best canoe in the village and take French leave."

So they waited, though very impatiently, in Klukwan for nearly a week, during which time Phil had ample opportunities for studying Chilkat architecture and totem poles. The houses of the village were all built of heavy hewn planks set on end. They had bark or plank roofs, with a square opening in each for the egress of smoke. Many of them had glass windows and ordinary doors; but in others the doors were placed so high from the ground as to be reached by ladders on both outside and inside. The great totem poles that stood before every house were ten, twenty, or thirty feet tall, and covered with heraldic carvings from bottom to top.

During this time of waiting the Shaman made re-



A CHILKAT "PRINCESS"

peated offers to sell the strangers a canoe, all of which were indignantly declined. That they did not appropriate one to their own use was for the very simple reason that all, except a few very small or leaky canoes, mysteriously disappeared from the village that first night.

At length the tricky medicine-man was forced to yield to the threats of the Princess, who had taken the part of our travellers from the first, and to popular clamor. He therefore announced one evening that he had been informed during a vision that the fur-seal's tooth would reappear among them on the morrow.

On the following morning Phil and his companions were aroused by a tremendous shouting and firing of guns, all of which proclaimed that the happy event had taken place.

"Now," cried Phil, "perhaps we will get our canoe."

But there were no canoes to be seen on the beach, and the Shaman coolly informed them that, though the precious tooth had indeed come back to dwell with the Chilkats, they would still be obliged to wait until some of the canoes returned from the hunting expeditions on which they had all been taken.

At this Phil fell into such a rage that, regardless of consequences, he was on the point of giving the old fraud a most beautiful thrashing, when his uplifted arm was startlingly arrested by the deep boom of a heavy gun that seemed to come from the mouth of the river.

CHAPTER XXXIX

INVADING A CAPTAIN'S CABIN

AN earthquake could hardly have caused greater consternation in the village of Klukwan than did the boom of that heavy gun as it came echoing up the palisaded valley of the Chilkat. Not many years before the Indians of that section had defied the power of the United States, and killed several American citizens. A gunboat, hurried to the scene of trouble, shelled and destroyed one of their villages in retaliation. From that time on, no sound was so terrible to them as the roar of a big gun.

While Phil and his companions were chafing at the delay imposed upon them by the greed of the Chilkat Shaman, a government vessel arrived in the neighboring inlet of Chilkoot, bearing a party of scientific men, who were to cross the mountains at that point for an exploration of the upper Yukon, and the locating of the boundary-line between Alaska and Canada.

The Princess, learning of its presence, and despairing of assisting her white friends in any other way, secretly despatched a messenger to the captain of the ship with the information that some Americans were being detained in Klukwan against their will. Upon receipt of this news the captain promptly steamed around into Chilkat Inlet, and as near to its head as the draught of his vessel would allow. As he dropped anchor, there came such a sound of firing from up the river that he imagined a fight to be in progress, and

fired one of his own big guns to give warning of his presence.

The effect of this dread message was instantaneous. Phil Ryder dropped his uplifted arm. The Chilkat Shaman scuttled away, issued an order, and within five minutes a new and perfectly equipped canoe was marvellously produced from somewhere and tendered to Serge Belcofsky. Five minutes later he and his companions had taken a grateful leave of the Princess, and were embarked with all their effects, including the three dogs.

Phil stationed himself in the bow, Serge tended sheet, and Jalap Coombs steered. As before the prevailing northerly wind their long-beaked canoe shot out from the river into the wider waters of the inlet, and they saw, at anchor, less than a mile away, a handsome cutter flying the United States revenue flag, the three friends uttered a simultaneous cry of:

“The *Phoca!*!”

“Hurrah!” yelled Phil.

“Hurrah!” echoed Serge.

“Bless her pretty picter!” roared Jalap Coombs, standing up and waving the old tarpaulin hat that, though often eclipsed by a fur hood, had been faithfully cherished during the entire journey.

Even Musky, Luvtuk, and big Amook caught the prevailing excitement, and gave vent to their feelings in loud and joyous barkings.

At that moment one of the cutter's boats, in command of a strange lieutenant, with a howitzer mounted in its bows, and manned by a dozen heavily armed sailors, hailed the canoe and shot alongside.

“What's the trouble up the river?” demanded the officer.

“There isn't any,” answered Phil.

“What was all the firing about?”

“Celebrating some sort of native Fourth of July. Is Captain Matthews still in command of the *Phoca*?”

“Yes. Does he know you?”

“I rather guess he does, and, with your permission, we’ll report to him in person.”

With this the canoe shot ahead, leaving the lieutenant greatly puzzled as to whether he should follow it or continue up the river, though he finally concluded to adopt the former course.

“Pull up the hoods of your parkas,” said Phil to his companions, “and we’ll give the captain a surprise-party.”

A minute later one of the *Phoca*’s quartermasters reported to the captain that a canoe-load of natives was almost alongside.

“Very well; let them come aboard, and I’ll hear what they have to say.”

In vain did the quartermaster strive to direct the canoe to the port gangway. The natives did not seem to understand, and insisted on rounding up under the starboard quarter, reserved for officers and distinguished guests. One of them sprang out the moment its bow touched the side steps, clambered aboard, pushed aside the wrathful quartermaster, and started for the captain’s door with the sailor in hot pursuit.

“Hold on, you blooming young savage! Ye can’t go in there,” he shouted, but to heedless ears.

As Phil gained the door it was opened by the commander himself, who was about to come out for a look at the natives.

“How are you, Captain Matthews?” shouted the fur-clad intruder into the sacred privacy of the cabin, at the same time raising a hand in salute. “It is awfully good of you, sir, to come for us. I only hope you didn’t bother to wait very long at the Pribyloffs.”

“Eh? What? Who are you, sir? What does this

mean? Phil Ryder! You young villain! You scamp! Bless my soul, but this is the most wonderful thing I ever heard of!" cried the astonished commander, staggering back into the cabin, and pulling Phil after him. "May, daughter, look here!"

At that moment there came a yelping rush, and with a chorus of excited barkings Musky, Luvtuk, and big Amook dashed pell-mell into the cabin. After them came Serge, Jalap Coombs, and the horrified quartermaster, all striving in vain to capture and restrain the riotous dogs. As if any one could prevent them from following and sharing the joy of the young master who had fed them night after night for months by lonely camp-fires of the Yukon Valley!

So they flung themselves into the cabin, and tore round and round, amid such a babel of shouts, laughter, barkings, and crash of overturned furniture as was never before heard in that orderly apartment.

Finally the terrible dogs were captured, one by one, and led away. May Matthews emerged from a safe retreat, where, convulsed with laughter, she had witnessed the whole uproarious proceeding. Her father, still ejaculating "Bless my soul!" at intervals, gradually recovered sufficient composure to recognize and welcome Serge and "Ipecac" Coombs, as he persisted in calling poor Jalap. The upset chairs were placed to rights, and all hands began to ask questions with such rapidity that no one had time to pause for answers.

From the confusion Captain Matthews finally evolved an understanding that the boys were still desirous of reaching Sitka, whereupon he remarked:

"Sitka! Sitka! It never occurred to me that you had any desire to visit Sitka. I thought your sole ambition was to attain the North Pole. If you had only mentioned Sitka last summer I might have arranged the trip for you; but now I fear—"

At this moment there came a knock at the door, and when it was opened the quartermaster began to say, "Excuse me, sir, but here's another—" Before he could finish his sentence a small furry object jerked away from him with such force that it took a header into the room, and landed at the feet of the commander on all fours, like a little bear.

"Bless my soul! What's this?" cried Captain Matthews, springing to one side in dismay.

"It's a baby!" screamed Miss May, darting forward and snatching up the child. "A darling little Indian in furs. Where did it come from?"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Phil, remorsefully. "To think that we should have forgotten Nel-te!"

"Are there any more yet to come?" demanded the captain.

"No, sir; the whole ship's company is present *and* accounted for," replied Jalap Coombs. "But with your leave, sir, I'll just step out and take a look at our boat, for she's a ticklish craft to navigate, and might come to grief in strange hands."

So saying, the honest fellow, glad of an excuse to escape from the cabin, where he felt awkward and out of place, as well as uncomfortably warm in his fur garments, pulled at the fringe of long wolf's hairs surrounding his face, and shuffled away. A few minutes later saw him in the forecastle, where, divested of his unsailor-like parka, puffing with infinite zest at one of the blackest of pipes filled with the blackest of tobacco, and the centre of an admiring group of seamen, he was spinning incredible yarns of his recent and wonderful experiences with snow-shoes and sledges.

In the meantime May Matthews was delightedly winning Nel-te's baby affections, while Phil and Serge were still plying the captain with questions.

"Were you saying, sir, that you feared you couldn't take us to Sitka?" inquired Serge, anxiously.

"Not at all, my lad," replied the captain. "I was about to remark that I feared you would not care to go there now, seeing that there is hardly any one in Sitka whom you want to see, unless it is your mother and sisters and Phil Ryder's father and aunt Ruth."

"What!" cried Phil, "my Aunt Ruth! Are you certain, sir?"

"Certain I am," replied Captain Matthews, "that if both the individuals I have just mentioned aren't already in Sitka, they will be there very shortly, for I left them in San Francisco preparing to start at once. Moreover, I have orders to carry your father to St. Michaels, where he expects to find you. So now you see in what a complication your turning up in this outlandish fashion involves me."

"But how did my aunt Ruth ever happen to come out here?" inquired Phil.

"Came out to nurse your father while his leg was mending, and incidentally to find out what had become of an undutiful nephew whom she seems to fancy has an aptitude for getting into scrapes," laughed the captain.

"Has my father recovered from his accident?"

"So entirely that he fancies his leg is sounder and better than ever it was."

"And are you bound for Sitka now, sir?"

"To be sure I am, and should have been half-way there by this time if I hadn't been delayed by a report of some sort of a row between the Chilkats and a party of whites. Now, having settled that difficulty by capturing the entire force of aggressors, I propose to carry them to Sitka as legitimate prisoners, and there turn them over to the authorities. So, gentlemen, you will please consider yourselves as prisoners of war, and un-

der orders not to leave this ship until she arrives at Sitka."

"With pleasure, sir," laughed Phil. "Only don't you think you'd better place us under guard?"

"I expect it will be best," replied the captain, gravely, "seeing that you are charged with seal-poaching, piracy, defying government officers, and escaping from arrest, as well as the present offence of making war on native Americans."

CHAPTER XL

IN SITKA TOWN

THE long-beaked and wonderfully carved Chilkat canoe was taken on the *Phoca's* deck, the anchor was weighed, and, with the trim cutter headed southward, the last stage of the adventurous journey, pursued amid such strange vicissitudes, was begun. As the ship sped swiftly past the overhanging ice-fields of Davidson Glacier, out of Chilkat Inlet into the broad, mountain-walled waters of Lynn Canal, and down that thoroughfare into Chatham Strait, Captain Matthews listened with absorbed interest to Phil's account of the remarkable adventures that he and Serge had encountered from the time he had last seen them at the Pribyloff Islands down to the present moment.

"Well," said he, when the recital was finished, "I've done a good bit of knocking about in queer places during thirty years of going to sea, and had some experiences, but my life has been tame and monotonous compared with the one you have led for the past year. Why, lad, if an account of what you have gone through in attempting to take a quiet little trip from New London to Sitka was written out and printed in a book, people wouldn't believe it was true. They'd shake their heads and say it was all made up, which only goes to prove, what I never believed before, that truth is sometimes stranger than fiction, after all."

"Yes," replied Phil; "and the strangest part of it all is the way that fur-seal's tooth has followed us

and exerted its influence in our behalf from the beginning to the very end. Why, sir, if it hadn't been for that tooth you wouldn't have come to Chilkat, and we shouldn't be in the happy position we are at this very moment."

"You don't mean to say," cried Captain Matthews, "that it turned up again after your father lost it?"

"Oh yes, sir, and it's been with us, off and on, all the time."

"Then at last I can have the pleasure of showing it to my daughter. Would you mind letting me have it for a few minutes?"

"Unfortunately, sir—"

"Now don't tell me that you have gone and lost it again!"

"Not exactly lost it," replied Phil. "At the same time, I don't know precisely where it is nor what has become of it, only it is somewhere back in Klukwan, where it originally came from, and I have every reason to believe that it is in possession of the principal Chilkat Shaman."

"I declare, that is too bad!" exclaimed the captain. "If I had known that sooner I believe I should have kept right on and shelled the village until they gave me the tooth, so strong is my desire to get hold of it."

"And so secured to yourself the ill-luck of him who steals it," laughed Phil.

That afternoon the *Phoca* turned sharply to the right, and began to thread the swift-rushing and rock-strewn waters of Peril Strait, the narrow channel that washes the northern end of Baranoff Island, on which Sitka is situated. Now Serge stood on the bridge beside his friend, so nervous with excitement that he could hardly speak. Every roaring tide rip and swirling eddy of those waters, every rock with its streamers of brown kelp, every beach and wooded point, were like

GOVERNOR'S MANSION, SITKA, ALASKA



familiar faces to the young Russo-American, for just beyond them lay his home, that dear home from which he had been more than three years absent.

Suddenly he clutched Phil's arm and pointed to a lofty, snow-crowned peak looming high above the forest and bathed in rosy sunlight. "There's Mount Edgecumbe!" he cried; and a few minutes afterwards, "There's Verstovoi!" Phil felt the nervous fingers tremble as they gripped his arm; and when, a little later, the cutter swept from a narrow passage into an island-studded bay, he could hardly hear the hoarse whisper of: "There, Phil! there's Sitka! Dear, beautiful Sitka!"

And Phil was nearly as excited as Serge to think that, after twelve months of ceaseless wanderings, the goal for which he had set forth was at last reached.

Serge pointed out in rapid succession the picturesque Greek church, the quaint little house known as the Governor's Mansion, the marine barracks, the solid log structure of the old Russian trading company, the long, straggling Indian village, and the fine "Governor's Walk" leading to beautiful Indian River. But he looked in vain for the most conspicuous landmark of all; for old Baranoff Castle, crowning Katlean's Rock, had been destroyed by fire since he left home.

The *Phoca* had hardly dropped anchor before another ship appeared entering the bay from the same direction. "The mail-steamer from Puget Sound," announced Captain Matthews.

This boat brought but few passengers, for the season was yet too early for tourists; but on her upper deck stood a gentleman and a lady, the former of whom was pointing out objects of interest almost as eagerly as Serge had done a short time before.

"It is lovely," said his companion, enthusiastically, "but it seems perfectly incredible that I should act-

ually be here, and that this is the place for which our Phil set out with such high hopes a year ago. Do you realize, John, that it is just one year ago to-day since he left New London? Oh, if we only knew where the dear boy was at this minute! And to think that I should have got here before him!"

"Now he will probably never get here," replied Mr. Ryder; "for, on account of that California offer, I shall be obliged to return directly to San Francisco from St. Michaels without even a chance of going up the Yukon, which I know will be a great disappointment to Phil. But look there, Ruth. You have been wanting to see a canoe-load of Indians, and here comes as typical a one as I ever saw. A perfect specimen of an Alaskan dug-out, natives in full winter costume, Eskimo dogs, and a sledge, I declare! They must have just come back from a hunting expedition to the mainland. See the snow-shoes slung on their backs, and how gracefully they handle their paddles! Even Phil might take a lesson from them in that."

"And, oh!" cried Miss Ruth, "there is a tiny bit of a child, all in furs, just like its father. See? Nestled among the dogs, with a pair of wee snow-shoes on his back too. Isn't he a darling? How I should love to hug him! Oh, John, we must find them when we get ashore; for that child is the very cutest thing I have seen in all Alaska."

"All right," replied Mr. Ryder, smiling good-naturedly at his sister's enthusiasm. "We will watch and see where they make a landing."

By this time the steamer was made fast, and the passengers were already going ashore. When Mr. Ryder and his sister gained the wharf they were surprised to see that the very canoe in which they were interested had come to the landing-stage, where its occupants were already disembarking.

"AUNT RUTH, YOU'RE A BRICK! A PERFECT BRICK!"



“What fair complexions they have for Indians,” said Miss Ruth, stopping to watch the natives. As the foremost of them ran up the steps, she moved aside to let him pass. The next moment she uttered a shriek of horror, for he had suddenly thrown his arms about her neck and kissed her.

“Aunt Ruth, you’re a brick! a perfect brick!” he cried. “To think of you coming away out here to see me!” Then turning to Mr. Ryder, and embracing that bewildered gentleman in his furry arms, the excited boy exclaimed: “And pop. You dear old pop! If you only knew how distressed I have been about you! If you hadn’t turned up just as you have, I should have dropped everything and gone in search of you.”

“Oh, Phil, how could you?” gasped Aunt Ruth. “You frightened me almost to death, and have crushed me all out of shape. You are a regular polar-bear in all those furs and things. What do you mean, sir? Oh, you dear, dear boy!” At this point Miss Ruth’s feelings so completely overcame her that she sat down on a convenient log and burst into hysterical weeping.

“There, you young scamp!” cried Mr. Ryder, whose own eyes were full of joyful tears at that moment. “See what you have done! Aren’t you ashamed of yourself, sir?”

“Yes, pop, awfully. But I’ve got something that will cheer her up and amuse her. And here’s Serge and— No he isn’t, either. What has become of Serge? Oh, I suppose he has gone home. Don’t see why he need be in such a hurry, though. No matter; here’s Jalap Coombs. You remember Jalap, father? And here, Aunt Ruth, is the curio I promised to bring you from Alaska. Look out; it’s alive!”

With this the crazy lad snatched Nel-te from the arms of Jalap Coombs, who had just brought him up the steps, and laid him in Miss Ruth’s lap, saying, “He’s

a little orphan kid that I found in the wilderness, and adopted for you to love.”

Miss Ruth gave such a start as the small bundle of fur was so unexpectedly thrust at her that poor Nel-te rolled to the ground. From there he lifted such a pitifully frightened little face, with such tear-filled eyes and quivering lips, that Miss Ruth snatched him up and hugged him. Then she kissed and petted him to such an extent that by the time he was again smiling he had won a place in her loving heart second only to that occupied by Phil himself.

In the meantime Musky, Luvtuk, and big Amook were tearing madly up and down the wharf, yelping and barking their joyful recognition of the fact that the long journey, with its months of hard work, was ended, and for them at least play-time had come.

With this journey's end also came the partings that always form so sad a feature of all journeys' ends. Even the three dogs that had travelled together for so long were separated, Musky being given to Serge, Luvtuk to May Matthews, to become the pet of the *Phoca's* crew, and big Amook going with Phil, Aunt Ruth, Nel-te, the sledge, the snow-shoes, and the beautiful white, thick-furred skin of a mountain goat to distant New London.

Mr. Ryder and Jalap Coombs accompanied them as far as San Francisco. Dear old Serge was reluctantly left behind, busily making preparations to carry out his cherished scheme of returning to Anvik as a teacher.

In San Francisco Mr. Ryder secured for Jalap Coombs the command of a trading schooner plying between that port and Honolulu. When it was announced to him that he was at last actually a captain, the honest fellow's voice trembled with emotion as he answered:

“Mr. Ryder, sir, *and* Phil, I never did wholly look to be a full-rigged cap'n, though I've striv and waited for the berth nigh on to forty year. Now I know that it's jest as my old friend Kite Roberson useter say; for he allus said, Kite did, that 'Them as waits the patientest is bound to see things happen.' ”

THE END

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