

golden rain that has fallen so opportunely to refresh the thirsty soil of well-born poverty. Not so my father; him I can imagine—" Here he broke off, smiling, as at some vision which his fancy had called up.

"I must get rid," he said after a pause, "of this habit, absurd in English eyes, of constant self-communing. I have lived with dreamers, and now I am going to cast in my lot with the most practical people on this side of the Atlantic, excellent Philistines who know not the subjective from the objective, to whom Kant is a jest and Hegel a mockery. Well! give me but time to pack my portmanteau and settle with my landlord, to bid farewell to old friends, and call a drosky to convey my luggage to the Eisenbahn, and I have done with Heidelberg."

More than one among the lady passengers by the express train, flashing meteor-like along the iron road that leads through Rhineland, past hoary strongholds of robber-knights, past terraced vineyards, bustling river-port, and splintered crag of long-dead volcanoes, glanced with a curiosity that almost amounted to interest at the handsome young traveller in his picturesque quaintness of student-garb.

Rupert Corbet's face was indeed one which, on painted canvas or in living flesh and blood, would have attracted notice anywhere, and this less perhaps on account of the young man's unquestioned good looks, as of something, singular and difficult to define, in the expression of the handsome features. Dress him in cloth of gold and Spanish lace, and he might well have been taken for the pictured presentment of one of those haughty cavaliers whom Vandyck and Velasquez drew so well. Let him but don the bravery of a reckless buccaneer, such as in Anne's time yet roved the Spanish main—the silver-buttoned jacket of gay hue, the crimson scarf with bullion tassels and

threatening array of pistols, the plumed hat and richly-mounted hanger—and he would have looked the character to the life.

Cologne, Liége, Brussels, Ghent—these were so many stages to be reached and left behind. Next came the salt breath and the cold grey gleam of the wintry sea, and then uprose the white, well-known cliffs, and a short dash through coppice and meadow brought the caravan of passengers into the roar of London. Yet a few hours, and Rupert Corbet had alighted at the station which was his goal, so far as railway travel was concerned, and was bowling briskly along at the swift, easy pace of a pair of high-stepping horses. One of the Earl's carriages had been in waiting at the station; and a short drive through a pretty country-side of hill and dale, well-wooded, and whence glimpses could be caught of a broad river, silver-bright in the distance, brought him to a high park-wall and to a gate-lodge overtopped by huge trees.

The gate, the stone piers of which were capped by the heraldic ravens of Corbet, flew open as the carriage drew near, and half a score of sturdy fellows, gamekeepers and woodmen by their garb, took off their hats with a suppressed cheer. Rupert nodded and smiled, affably enough, in acknowledgment of this greeting; and as he swept on through the park, and gazed from right to left at the swelling uplands of the park, at the antlered herds that lifted their graceful heads to gaze at the invader of their sylvan haunts, and at the magnificent oaks of the grand avenue, at the end of which appeared a stately castellated mansion, he realised for the first time how great was the gulf that separated Herr Ruprecht of Heidelberg from Rupert, Lord Romsey.

END OF CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

CHRISTMAS IN THE FAR WEST.



CHRISTMAS DAY in the midst of the vast Kansas prairies— Christmas Day with the thermometer registering fourteen degrees below zero inside our shanty, and the cold wind gaining

easy admittance through every hole and crevice in the thin weather-boarding. We are lying almost smothered in blankets and wrappers along the sides of our little hut, upon the big chests we brought from England fifteen months ago. Bedsteads and bedding are luxuries we

discarded when we entered upon our new mode of life, and we are now quite reconciled to their absence. We

feel disposed to boast of our Spartan hardihood, and look with contempt upon the effeminacy of European civilisation. I am lying with my feet against those of Harry Norman, and our heads are close to the wall at either end of the room. On the other side, Fred Maitland and Frank Wright occupy similar relative positions, while upon the floor beneath us are Maitland's two sturdy boys, Jack and Percy. We must not move or turn in our sleep, for our boxes are not wide enough to permit reckless motion, and a fall would be broken by the bodies of the lads below. A north wind, or "norther," has been blowing for the past three days, and though it has veered round and the sun is shining, it is very cold, and our blankets are white with the congealed breath of the night. The bucket of water kept for household use has frozen into a solid mass, and every few minutes makes a cracking noise like a pistol-shot.

We have no woman to prepare our meals and keep things neat and clean, but we manage pretty well in a rough way. Maitland has a wife in the "old country,"

but he will not bring her out until he has a home fit for the reception of an English lady. The rest of the party are young and hardy, and for a time the rude frontier life is full of novelty and excitement and hard work.

But in mid-winter there is little to do; care of the stock and care of ourselves are the only duties, and

always asked, but seldom cheerfully responded to, in the morning, but on this Christmas holiday there is no hesitation, and I spring boldly to my feet, already partially dressed. I am unusually fortunate, and the fire, as if in recognition of the day, permits itself to be lighted without the display of obstinacy which generally tries our temper to the utmost. By its warmth I



OUR SHANTY.

after the cattle in the corral have been fed and watered we hasten back to the fire-side, and sit there until the approach of night sends us forth again to seek the "lowing herd." Then "early to bed," for in bed alone can warmth be maintained, in spite of our red-hot stove and thick clothing. "Early to rise" does not form part of our duty, and we almost wish that, like bears, we could roll ourselves up in our den and sleep away the winter, to come out, thin and hungry and blinking, into the spring sunshine.

"Who's going to light the fire?" is the question

finish my toilet, and then, running to the little brooklet which flows a few yards distant, the ice is broken with an axe, a bucket is filled with water, and the kettle is placed hissing upon the fire.

Then the others show signs of life which they had carefully concealed until the fire was lighted. Frank Wright unrolls himself from his blankets, and hastens to prepare the breakfast. He is our cook on this important occasion, and shows that he feels the responsibility of his position. He stirs the corn-meal with a practised hand, hews a large piece from the

pig which hangs frozen in a corner, and places it on the fire to thaw, preparatory to cutting it into slices for frying. He mixes the flour for the flap-jacks, without which the meal would be incomplete, and boils the coffee. Breakfast is soon ready, and as quickly eaten; for though we sit round the red-hot stove, our cups of boiling coffee would be frozen in twenty minutes were they even placed upon the table within our reach.

Next come the preparations for the grand Christmas dinner—not the first we have eaten on this continent,

see it in England, only veneering the fields and hedges and trees, but one spotless white mantle without rent or stain: snow beneath us and blue sky above. Looking heavenward, we see a phenomenon which astonishes and almost alarms us, until we recollect that we have heard of similar appearances and remember their cause. There are two suns in the firmament—one directly above the other, the lower sun being the more brilliant. It is the first time we have witnessed this singular spectacle, though it was occasionally seen afterwards in unusually cold weather.

Sometimes three orbs have been visible, but in more northern regions, where winter is still more severe.

The snow crumbles beneath our feet; the keen, frosty air bites our cheeks and brings a glow to our noses which in a milder climate would be ascribed to a less innocent cause. Walnut and oak are soon chopped into lengths and split into fragments for the stove, each resounding blow of the axe severing some gnarled limb and sending fragrant chips into the



but the first of our own cooking. The joint of English roast beef could not, of course, be procured; but in its place there is a tempting piece of buffalo-beef, bought for six cents (or threepence) a pound from hunters just arrived from the plains. A Christmas pudding we must have, and a journey over the frozen prairie has been made to the nearest village for the ingredients, or as many of them as might be obtained in that region. Two wild ducks have fallen beneath Frank Wright's unerring gun; and with a plump prairie hen, obtained in the same manner, we have material for a meal which would please an epicure.

The boys are set to work to pull the feathers from the birds, while Norman and Maitland feed the cattle. I am detailed to chop the supply of wood for the day, a task which pleases me well, for wood-cutting is almost the only kind of labour by which circulation and warmth can be maintained. These arrangements have been made during breakfast, according to our usual custom.

It is a strange and magnificent picture which we behold as we step out from the shanty. The undulating prairie, extending far as the eye can reach, is covered with pure white snow, glowing with dazzling brilliancy beneath the cold rays of the sun—not as we

untainted air. Enlivened with the exercise, I quickly carry the wood in-doors, and pile it in a corner ready for use by the cook, who is hard at work stewing, and basting, and tasting, with an affectation of solemnity which makes us laugh heartily.

The stockmen soon return. They have fed the long-horned Texas and Cherokee cattle, pulled down the bars of the corral, and turned the willing beasts loose upon the prairie to wander at their own sweet will. The stock, glad to escape from confinement, in spite of the cold, march with tinkling bells to a favourite sheltered feeding-ground on the other side of the creek, and leave us to our enjoyment. The grass is covered deeply with snow, but their wild nature makes them prefer the cold prairie and liberty to warmth and confinement.

Reminiscences of "old times" from Maitland, and tales and jokes from Norman, one of the wittiest men I have met, pass the hours quickly away. Our *chef* is subjected to a good deal of *badinage* while we are awaiting the completion of his mysterious rites, and his dignity is sorely lowered when it is discovered that he has unwittingly dropped the plum-pudding into an empty saucepan, and is carefully baking it and spoiling the saucepan at the same time. The burly, good-tempered farmer, however, receives in good part the laugh that is raised against him on the score of this and other eccentricities detected in the course of the morning.

At length it is announced that everything is ready. Maitland, the senior of our little party, takes his place at the head of the carpenter's bench which does duty as a table, and in merry conversation the time passes away. The cook has been duly complimented on his skill and success, and forgets the good-natured satire lately levelled against him. Our minds are filled with the memories of earlier days when Christmas was spent with friends or in happy home circles, and "I wonder how they are enjoying themselves in the old country," is the remark that breaks involuntarily from each of us some time in the day. It is finally dismissed by young Jack, who thinks that "if they are getting along as bully as we are, you bet they're all right!" and we all concur with him. The hopeful young scion has devoted all his powers of mind to the acquirement of a sound knowledge of Western slang, and has succeeded "passing well." Our party is strictly temperate. Wine we have not; there is a keg of whiskey in the shanty, but though glances are occasionally cast towards it, no suggestions are put forward as to its immediate application. It has been obtained for a special purpose, and it is felt that even on this day we have no right to divert it from that purpose.

Whiskey is believed by Western men to be one of the most successful remedies for rattlesnake bites. These venomous reptiles abound on the prairies, and in summer one will often be found coiled up under a sleeper who is camping out, attracted by the warmth of his body. We discovered a rattlesnake once in the house, under some clothing which was lying upon the floor, but it was soon killed. Happily, it is sluggish in its habits, and the quick, whirring, grasshopper-like noise of the rattle generally gives timely warning of its proximity, so that it is easily despatched. So far as dangerous American snakes are concerned, it is a merciful dispensation of Providence that they are generally inert and tardy in their movements, unlike the majority of harmless reptiles of the species. Were they otherwise, danger would be increased tenfold, and deaths

from their bite would be numerous instead of being rare, as is the case. Should, however, a rattlesnake bite a man, death results in a few hours, unless some of the few known antidotes are instantly applied. No reliable remedy has yet been discovered, but the raw, fiery Western whiskey is considered efficacious and is generally used, the person bitten having to drink all he can take. It is supposed that the spirit neutralises the effect of the venom—poison counteracting poison, they say—so the patient must drink until he becomes intoxicated. Not until that happy result is arrived at is he safe. If, as is sometimes the case, the potent spirit has no effect upon him, he dies in agony. Some time ago, a man in a drinking saloon, in a fit of bravado, made a wager that he would allow himself to be bitten by a rattlesnake and would remain unhurt. A bystander as reckless, and at least as culpable as himself, accepted the bet, and steps were at once taken for its fulfilment. A snake was found, placed in a box, and brought to the saloon. The man bared his arm and lifted the lid of the box. The snake lay coiled up, its head raised, and its eyes glowing with anger, while the quick vibrations of its horny tail, so rapid as to be almost invisible, gave rise to the noise from which it has been named. It darted suddenly upward, straightening out its body, thrust two tiny spear-like fangs into the unshrinking arm above it, and was then beaten down and killed. But it had done its work. Two little spots, scarcely to be seen, were the only marks, "not as deep as a well, nor as wide as a church door," but they were enough; they served. The wager was lost. Whiskey, as much as the man could drink, was forced upon him, but the poison had greater power. His agony became extreme as the venom coursed through his veins, and in a few hours life was extinct. Sobered by the tragic termination, his companions went to their homes, carrying with them remorse for the part they had played and the share they had borne in the death of their comrade.

Knowing the danger that exists in the event of an accident, we feel that we had better drink to our distant friends in pure water or coffee, rather than use the spirit obtained for a much more serious purpose. Pipes are smoked and yarns spun until the sinking sun warns us that the stock must be hunted up and corralled. Horses are saddled, and riders are soon cantering over the prairie in search of the herd, and in a short time the cracking of stock-whips and the shouts of horsemen announce that the cattle have been found and are on their homeward road. Then they are penned in the corral and fed with hay and maize, the horses are stabled, a final pipe is smoked, and we "turn in" at an hour when in the old country all would be life and gaiety.

W. H. WILTSHIRE.

