

A photograph of a dense forest with tall, thin trees and a wooden boardwalk leading through the undergrowth. The forest floor is covered in fallen leaves and small plants. The trees are mostly evergreens, and the lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

***CATHARINE PARR
STRICKLAND
TRAILL***

***LOST IN THE BACKWOODS:
A TALE OF THE CANADIAN
FOREST***

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Lost in the Backwoods: A Tale of the Canadian Forest

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CHAPTER I.

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"The morning had shot her bright streamers on high,
O'er Canada, opening all pale to the sky,
Still dazzling and white was the robe that she wore,
Except where the ocean wave lashed on the shore"

Jacobite Song

There lies, between the Rice Lake and the Ontario, a deep and fertile valley, surrounded by lofty wood-crowned hills, clothed chiefly with groves of oak and pine, the sides of the hills and the alluvial bottoms display a variety of noble timber trees of various kinds, as the useful and beautiful maple, beech, and hemlock. This beautiful and highly picturesque valley is watered by many clear streams, whence it derives its appropriate appellation of "Cold Springs."

At the period my little history commences, this now highly cultivated spot was an unbroken wilderness,—all but two clearings, where dwelt the only occupiers of the soil,—which previously owned no other possessors than the wandering hunting tribes of wild Indians, to whom the right of the hunting grounds north of Rice Lake appertained, according to their forest laws.

I speak of the time when the neat and flourishing town of Cobourg, now an important port on Lake Ontario, was but a village in embryo,—if it contained even a log-house or a block-house, it was all that it did,—and the wild and picturesque ground upon which the fast increasing village of Port Hope is situated had not yielded one forest tree to the axe of the settler. No gallant vessel spread her sails to waft the abundant produce of grain and Canadian stores along the waters of that noble sheet of water; no steamer had then furrowed its bosom with her iron paddles, bearing the stream of emigration towards the wilds of our northern and western forests, there to render a lonely trackless desert a fruitful garden. What will not time and the industry of man, assisted by the blessing of a merciful God, effect? To him be the glory and honour; for we are taught that "unless the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it: without the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

But to my tale. And first it will be necessary to introduce to the acquaintance of my young readers the founders of our little settlement at Cold Springs.

Duncan Maxwell was a young Highland soldier, a youth of eighteen, at the famous battle of Quebec, where, though only a private, he received the praise of his colonel for his brave conduct. At the close of the battle Duncan was wounded; and as the hospital was full at the time, he was billeted in the house of a poor French Canadian widow in the Quebec suburb. Here, though a foreigner and an enemy, he received much kind attention from his excellent hostess and her family, consisting of a young man about his own age,

and a pretty black-eyed lass not more than sixteen. The widow Perron was so much occupied with other lodgers—for she kept a sort of boarding-house—that she had not much time to give to Duncan, so that he was left a great deal to her son Pierre, and a little to Catharine, her daughter.

Duncan Maxwell was a fine, open-tempered, frank lad, and he soon won the regard of Pierre and his sister. In spite of the prejudices of country, and the difference of language and national customs, a steady and increasing friendship grew up between the young Highlander and the children of his hostess; therefore it was not without feelings of deep regret that they heard the news that the regiment to which Duncan belonged was ordered for embarkation to England, and Duncan was so far convalescent as to be pronounced quite well enough to join it. Alas for poor Catharine! she now found that parting with her patient was a source of the deepest sorrow to her young and guileless heart; nor was Duncan less moved at the separation from his gentle nurse. It might be for years, and it might be for ever, he could not tell; but he could not tear himself away without telling the object of his affections how dear she was to him, and to whisper a hope that he might yet return one day to claim her as his bride; and Catharine, weeping and blushing, promised to wait for that happy day, or to remain single for his sake.

They say the course of true love never did run smooth; but with the exception of this great sorrow, the sorrow of separation, the love of our young Highland soldier and his betrothed knew no other interruption, for absence served

only to strengthen the affection which was founded on gratitude and esteem.

Two long years passed, however, and the prospect of reunion was yet distant, when an accident, which disabled Duncan from serving his country, enabled him to retire with the usual little pension, and return to Quebec to seek his affianced. Some changes had taken place during that short period: the widow Perron was dead; Pierre, the gay, lively-hearted Pierre, was married to a daughter of a lumberer; and Catharine, who had no relatives in Quebec, had gone up the country with her brother and his wife, and was living in some little settlement above Montreal with them.

Thither Duncan followed, and shortly afterwards was married to his faithful Catharine. On one point they had never differed, both being of the same religion.

Pierre had seen a good deal of the fine country on the shores of Lake Ontario; he had been hunting with some friendly Indians between the great waters and the Rice Lake; and he now thought if Duncan and himself could make up their minds to a quiet life in the woods, there was not a better spot than the hill pass between the plains and the big lake to fix themselves upon. Duncan was of the same opinion when he saw the spot. It was not rugged and bare like his own Highlands, but softer in character, yet his heart yearned for the hill country. In those days there was no obstacle to taking possession of any tract of land in the unsurveyed forests; therefore Duncan agreed with his brother-in-law to pioneer the way with him, get a dwelling put up, and some ground prepared and "seeded down," and then to return for their wives, and settle as farmers. Others

had succeeded, had formed little colonies, and become the heads of villages in due time; why should not they? And now behold our two backwoodsmen fairly commencing their arduous life: it was nothing, after all, to Pierre, by previous occupation a hardy lumberer, or the Scottish soldier, accustomed to brave all sorts of hardships in a wild country, himself a mountaineer, inured to a stormy climate and scanty fare from his earliest youth. But it is not my intention to dwell upon the trials and difficulties courageously met and battled with by our settlers and their young wives.

There was in those days a spirit of resistance among the first settlers on the soil, a spirit to do and bear, that is less commonly met with now. The spirit of civilization is now so widely diffused, that her comforts are felt even in the depths of the forest, so that the newly come emigrant feels comparatively few of the physical evils that were endured by the earlier inhabitants.

The first seed-wheat that was cast into the ground by Duncan and Pierre was brought with infinite trouble a distance of fifty miles in a little skiff, navigated along the shores of Lake Ontario by the adventurous Pierre, and from the nearest landing-place transported on the shoulders of himself and Duncan to their homestead. A day of great labour but great joy it was when they deposited their precious freight in safety on the shanty floor. They were obliged to make two journeys for the contents of the little craft. What toil, what privation they endured for the first two years! and now the fruits of it began to appear.

No two creatures could be more unlike than Pierre and Duncan. The Highlander, stern, steady, persevering,

cautious, always giving ample reasons for his doing or his not doing. The Canadian, hopeful, lively, fertile in expedients, and gay as a lark; if one scheme failed, another was sure to present itself. Pierre and Duncan were admirably suited to be friends and neighbours. The steady perseverance of the Scot helped to temper the volatile temperament of the Frenchman. They generally contrived to compass the same end by different means, as two streams descending from opposite hills will meet in one broad river in the same valley.

Years passed on: the farm, carefully cultivated, began to yield its increase; food and warm clothing were not wanting in the homestead. Catharine had become, in course of time, the happy mother of four healthy children; her sister-in-law had exceeded her in these welcome contributions to the population of a new colony.

Between the children of Pierre and Catharine the most charming harmony prevailed; they grew up as one family, a pattern of affection and early friendship. Though different in tempers and dispositions, Hector Maxwell, the eldest son of the Scottish soldier, and his cousin, young Louis Perron, were greatly attached: they, with the young Catharine and Mathilde, formed a little coterie of inseparables; their amusements, tastes, pursuits, occupations, all blended and harmonized delightfully; there were none of those little envyings and bickerings among them that pave the way to strife and disunion in after-life.

Catharine Maxwell and her cousin Louis were more like brother and sister than Hector and Catharine; but Mathilde

was gentle and dove-like, and formed a contrast to the gravity of Hector and the vivacity of Louis and Catharine.

Hector and Louis were fourteen—strong, vigorous, industrious, and hardy, both in constitution and habits. The girls were turned of twelve. It is not with Mathilde that our story is connected, but with the two lads and Catharine. With the gaiety and *naivete* of the Frenchwoman, Catharine possessed, when occasion called it into action, a thoughtful and well-regulated mind, abilities which would well have repaid the care of mental cultivation; but of book-learning she knew nothing beyond a little reading, and that but imperfectly, acquired from her father's teaching. It was an accomplishment which he had gained when in the army, having been taught by his colonel's son, a lad of twelve years of age, who had taken a great fancy to him, and had at parting given him a few of his school-books, among which was a Testament without cover or title-page. At parting, the young gentleman recommended its daily perusal to Duncan. Had the gift been a Bible, perhaps the soldier's obedience to his priest might have rendered it a dead letter to him; but as it fortunately happened, he was unconscious of any prohibition to deter him from becoming acquainted with the truths of the gospel. He communicated the power of perusing his books to his children Hector and Catharine, Duncan and Kenneth, in succession, with a feeling of intense reverence; even the labour of teaching was regarded as a holy duty in itself, and was not undertaken without deeply impressing the obligation he was conferring upon them whenever they were brought to the task. It was indeed a precious boon, and the children learned to consider it as a

pearl beyond all price in the trials that awaited them in their eventful career. To her knowledge of religious truths young Catharine added an intimate acquaintance with the songs and legends of her father's romantic country; often would her plaintive ballads and old tales, related in the hut or the wigwam to her attentive auditors, wile away heavy thoughts.

It was a lovely sunny day in the flowery month of June. Canada had not only doffed that "dazzling white robe" mentioned in the songs of her Jacobite emigrants, but had assumed the beauties of her loveliest season; the last week in May and the first three of June being parallel to the English May, full of buds and flowers and fair promise of ripening fruits.

The high sloping hills surrounding the fertile vale of Cold Springs were clothed with the blossoms of the gorgeous scarlet castilegia coccinea, or painted-cup; the large, pure, white blossoms of the lily-like trillium grandiflorum; the delicate and fragile lilac geranium, whose graceful flowers woo the hand of the flower-gatherer only to fade almost within his grasp: the golden cypridium or moccasin flower, so singular, so lovely in its colour and formation, waved heavily its yellow blossoms as the breeze shook the stems; and there, mingling with a thousand various floral beauties, the azure lupine claimed its place, shedding almost a heavenly tint upon the earth. Thousands of roses were blooming on the more level ground, sending forth their rich fragrance, mixed with the delicate scent of the feathery ceanothus (New Jersey tea). The vivid greenness of the young leaves of the forest, the tender tint of the springing

corn, was contrasted with the deep dark fringe of waving pines on the hills, and the yet darker shade of the spruce and balsams on the borders of the creeks, for so our Canadian forest rills are universally termed. The bright glancing wings of the summer red-bird, the crimson-headed woodpecker, the gay blue-bird, and noisy but splendid plumed jay might be seen among the branches; the air was filled with beauteous sights and soft murmuring sounds.

Under the shade of the luxuriant hop-vines that covered the rustic porch in front of the little dwelling, the light step of Catharine Maxwell might be heard mixed with the drowsy whirring of the big wheel, as she passed to and fro guiding the thread of yarn in its course. And now she sang snatches of old mountain songs, such as she had learned from her father; and now, with livelier air, hummed some gay French tune to the household melody of her spinning-wheel, as she advanced and retreated with her thread, unconscious of the laughing black eyes that were watching her movements from among the embowering foliage that shielded her from the morning sun.

"Come, ma belle cousine," for so Louis delighted to call her. "Hector and I are waiting for you to go with us to the 'Beaver Meadow.' The cattle have strayed, and we think we shall find them there. The day is delicious, the very flowers look as if they wanted to be admired and plucked, and we shall find early strawberries on the old Indian clearing."

Catharine cast a longing look abroad, but said, "I fear I cannot go to-day; for see, I have all these rolls of wool to spin up, and my yarn to wind off the reel and twist; and then, my mother is away."

"Yes, I left her with mamma," replied Louis, "and she said she would be home shortly, so her absence need not stay you. She said you could take a basket and try and bring home some berries for sick Louise. Hector is sure he knows a spot where we shall get some fine ones, ripe and red." As he spoke Louis whisked away the big wheel to one end of the porch, gathered up the hanks of yarn and tossed them into the open wicker basket, and the next minute the large, coarse, flapped straw hat, that hung upon the peg in the porch, was stuck not very gracefully on Catharine's head and tied beneath her chin, with a merry rattling laugh, which drowned effectually the small lecture that Catharine began to utter by way of reproofing the light-hearted boy.

"But where is Mathilde?"

"Sitting like a dear good girl, as she is, with sick Louise's head in her lap, and would not disturb her for all the fruit and flowers in Canada. Marie cried sadly to go with us, but I promised her and Louise lots of flowers and berries if we get them, and the dear children were as happy as queens when I left."

"But stay, cousin, you are sure my mother gave her consent to my going? We shall be away chief part of the day. You know it is a long walk to the Beaver Meadow and back again," said Catharine, hesitating as Louis took her hand to lead her out from the porch.

"Yes, yes, ma belle," said the giddy boy quickly; "so come along, for Hector is waiting at the barn. But stay, we shall be hungry before we return, so let us have some cakes and butter, and do not forget a tin cup for water."

Nothing doubting, Catharine, with buoyant spirits, set about her little preparations, which were soon completed; but just as she was leaving the little garden enclosure, she ran back to kiss Kenneth and Duncan, her young brothers. In the farm-yard she found Hector with his axe on his shoulder. "What are you taking the axe for, Hector? you will find it heavy to carry," said his sister.

"In the first place, I have to cut a stick of blue beech to make a broom for sweeping the house, sister of mine, and that is for your use, Miss Kate, and in the next place, I have to find, if possible, a piece of rock elm or hickory for axe handles: so now you have the reason why I take the axe with me."

The children left the clearing and struck into one of the deep defiles that lay between the hills, and cheerfully they laughed and sung and chattered, as they sped on their pleasant path, nor were they loath to exchange the glowing sunshine for the sober gloom of the forest shade. What handfuls of flowers of all hues, red, blue, yellow, and white, were gathered, only to be gazed at, carried for a while, then cast aside for others fresher and fairer. And now they came to cool rills that flowed, softly murmuring, among mossy limestone, or blocks of red or gray granite, wending their way beneath twisted roots and fallen trees; and often Catharine lingered to watch the eddying dimples of the clear water, to note the tiny bright fragments of quartz or crystallized limestone that formed a shining pavement below the stream. And often she paused to watch the angry movements of the red squirrel, as, with feathery tail erect, and sharp scolding note, he crossed their woodland path,

and swiftly darting up the rugged bark of some neighbouring pine or hemlock, bade the intruders on his quiet haunts defiance; yet so bold in his indignation, he scarcely condescended to ascend beyond their reach. The long-continued, hollow tapping of the large red-headed woodpecker, or the singular subterranean sound caused by the drumming of the partridge striking his wings upon his breast to woo his gentle mate, and the soft whispering note of the little tree-creeper, as it flitted from one hemlock to another, collecting its food between the fissures of the bark, were among the few sounds that broke the noontide stillness of the woods; but to such sights and sounds the lively Catharine and her cousin were not indifferent. And often they wondered that Hector gravely pursued his onward way, and seldom lingered as they did to mark the bright colours of the flowers, or the sparkling of the forest rill, or the hurrying to and fro of the turkeys among the luxuriant grass.

"What makes Hec so grave?" said Catharine to her companion, as they seated themselves upon a mossy trunk to await his coming up; for they had giddily chased each other till they had far outrun him.

"Hector, sweet coz, is thinking perhaps of how many bushels of corn or wheat this land would grow if cleared, or he may be examining the soil or the trees, or is looking for his stick of blue beech for your broom, or the hickory for his axe handles, and never heeding such nonsense as woodpeckers, and squirrels, and lilies, and moss, and ferns; for Hector is not a giddy thing like his cousin Louis, or—"

"His sister Kate," interrupted Catharine merrily. "But when shall we come to the Beaver Meadow?"

"Patience, ma belle, all in good time. Hark! was not that the ox-bell? No; Hector whistling." And soon they heard the heavy stroke of his axe ringing among the trees; for he had found the blue beech, and was cutting it to leave on the path, that he might take it home on their return: he had also marked some hickory of a nice size for his axe handles, to bring home at some future time.

The children had walked several miles, and were not sorry to sit down and rest till Hector joined them.

He was well pleased with his success, and declared he felt no fatigue. "As soon as we reach the old Indian clearing, we shall find strawberries," he said, "and a fresh cold spring, and then we will have our dinner."

"Come, Hector,—come, Louis," said Catharine, jumping up, "I long to be gathering the strawberries; and see, my flowers are faded, so I will throw them away, and the basket shall be filled with fresh fruit instead, and we must not forget petite Marie and sick Louise, or dear Mathilde. Ah, how I wish she were here at this minute! But there is the opening to the Beaver Meadow."

And the sunlight was seen streaming through the opening trees as they approached the cleared space, which some called the "Indian clearing," but is now more generally known as the little Beaver Meadow. It was a pleasant spot, green, and surrounded with light bowery trees and flowering shrubs, of a different growth from those that belong to the dense forest. Here the children found, on the hilly ground above, fine ripe strawberries, the earliest they had seen that

year, and soon all weariness was forgotten while pursuing the delightful occupation of gathering the tempting fruit; and when they had refreshed themselves, and filled the basket with leaves and fruit, they slaked their thirst at the stream which wound its way among the bushes. Catharine neglected not to reach down flowery bunches of the fragrant whitethorn, and the high-bush cranberry, then radiant with nodding umbels of snowy blossoms, or to wreath the handle of the little basket with the graceful trailing runners of the lovely twin-flowered plant, the *Linnaea borealis*, which she always said reminded her of the twins Louise and Marie, her little cousins. And now the day began to wear away, for they had lingered long in the little clearing; they had wandered from the path by which they entered it, and had neglected, in their eagerness to look for the strawberries, to notice any particular mark by which they might regain it. Just when they began to think of returning, Louis noticed a beaten path, where there seemed recent prints of cattle hoofs on a soft spongy soil beyond the creek.

"Come, Hector," said he gaily, "this is lucky; we are on the cattle-path; no fear but it will lead us directly home, and that by a nearer track."

Hector was undecided about following it; he fancied it bent too much towards the setting sun; but his cousin overruled his objection. "And is not this our own creek?" he said. "I have often heard my father say it had its rise somewhere about this old clearing."

Hector now thought Louis might be right, and they boldly followed the path among the poplars, thorns, and bushes that clothed its banks, surprised to see how open the

ground became, and how swift and clear the stream swept onward.

"Oh, this dear creek," cried the delighted Catharine, "how pretty it is! I shall often follow its course after this; no doubt it has its source from our own Cold Springs."

And so they cheerfully pursued their way, till the sun, sinking behind the range of westerly hills, soon left them in gloom; but they anxiously hurried forward when the stream wound its noisy way among steep stony banks, clothed scantily with pines and a few scattered silver-barked poplars. And now they became bewildered by two paths leading in opposite directions; one upward among the rocky hills, the other through the opening gorge of a deep ravine.

Here, overcome with fatigue, Catharine seated herself on a large block of granite, near a great bushy pine that grew beside the path by the ravine, unable to proceed; and Hector, with a grave and troubled countenance, stood beside her, looking round with an air of great perplexity. Louis, seating himself at Catharine's feet, surveyed the deep gloomy valley before them, and sighed heavily. The conviction forcibly struck him that they had mistaken the path altogether. The very aspect of the country was different; the growth of the trees, the flow of the stream, all indicated a change of soil and scene. Darkness was fast drawing its impenetrable veil around them; a few stars were stealing out, and gleaming down as if with pitying glance upon the young wanderers, but they could not light up their pathway or point their homeward track. The only sounds, save the lulling murmur of the rippling stream below, were the plaintive note of the whip-poor-will, from a gnarled oak

that grew near them, and the harsh grating scream of the night hawk, darting about in the higher regions of the air, pursuing its noisy congeners, or swooping down with that peculiar hollow rushing sound, as of a person blowing into some empty vessel, when it seizes with wide-extended bill its insect prey.

Hector was the first to break the silence. "Cousin Louis, we were wrong in following the course of the stream; I fear we shall never find our way back tonight."

Louis made no reply; his sad and subdued air failed not to attract the attention of his cousins.

"Why, Louis, how is this? you are not used to be cast down by difficulties," said Hector, as he marked something like tears glistening in the dark eyes of his cousin.

Louis's heart was full; he did not reply, but cast a troubled glance upon the weary Catharine, who leaned heavily against the tree beneath which she sat.

"It is not," resumed Hector, "that I mind passing a summer's night under such a sky as this, and with such a dry grassy bed below me; but I do not think it is good for Catharine to sleep on the bare ground in the night dews,—and then they will be so anxious at home about our absence."

Louis burst into tears, and sobbed out,— "And it is all my doing that she came out with us; I deceived her, and my aunt will be angry and much alarmed, for she did not know of her going at all. Dear Catharine, good cousin Hector, pray forgive me!"

But Catharine was weeping too much to reply to his passionate entreaties; and Hector, who never swerved from

the truth, for which he had almost a stern reverence, hardly repressed his indignation at what appeared to him a most culpable act of deceit on the part of Louis.

The sight of her cousin's grief and self-abasement touched the tender heart of Catharine; for she was kind and dove-like in her disposition, and loved Louis, with all his faults. Had it not been for the painful consciousness of the grief their unusual absence would occasion at home, Catharine would have thought nothing of their present adventure; but she could not endure the idea of her high-principled father taxing her with deceiving her kind indulgent mother and him. It was this humiliating thought which wounded the proud heart of Hector, causing him to upbraid his cousin in somewhat harsh terms for his want of truthfulness, and steeled him against the bitter grief that wrung the heart of the penitent Louis, who, leaning his wet cheek on the shoulder of Catharine, sobbed as if his heart would break, heedless of her soothing words and affectionate endeavours to console him.

"Dear Hector," she said, turning her soft pleading eyes on the stern face of her brother, "you must not be so very angry with poor Louis. Remember it was to please me, and give me the enjoyment of a day of liberty with you and himself in the woods, among the flowers and trees and birds, that he committed this fault."

"Catharine, Louis told an untruth, and acted deceitfully. And look at the consequences: we shall have forfeited our parents' confidence, and may have some days of painful privation to endure before we regain our home, if we ever do find our way back to Cold Springs," replied Hector.

"It is the grief and anxiety our dear parents will endure this night," answered Catharine, "that distresses my mind; but," she added, in more cheerful tones, "let us not despair, no doubt to-morrow we shall be able to retrace our steps."

With the young there is ever a magical spell in that little word *to-morrow*,—it is a point which they pursue as fast as it recedes from them; sad indeed is the young heart that does not look forward with hope to the future!

The cloud still hung on Hector's brow, till Catharine gaily exclaimed, "Come, Hector! come Louis! we must not stand idling thus; we must think of providing some shelter for the night: it is not good to rest upon the bare ground exposed to the night dews.—See, here is a nice hut, half made," pointing to a large upturned root which some fierce whirlwind had hurled from the lofty bank into the gorge of the dark glen.

"Now you must make haste, and lop off a few pine boughs, and stick them into the ground, or even lean them against the roots of this old oak, and there, you see, will be a capital house to shelter us. To work, to work, you idle boys, or poor wee Katty must turn squaw and build her own wigwam," she playfully added, taking up the axe which rested against the feathery pine beneath which Hector was leaning. Now, Catharine cared as little as her brother and cousin about passing a warm summer's night under the shade of the forest trees, for she was both hardy and healthy; but her woman's heart taught her that the surest means of reconciling the cousins would be by mutually interesting them in the same object,—and she was right. In endeavouring to provide for the comfort of their dear

companion, all angry feelings were forgotten by Hector, while active employment chased away Louis's melancholy.

Unlike the tall, straight, naked trunks of the pines of the forest, those of the plains are adorned with branches often to the very ground, varying in form and height, and often presenting most picturesque groups, or rising singly among scattered groves of the silver-barked poplar or graceful birch trees; the dark mossy greenness of the stately pine contrasting finely with the light waving foliage of its slender, graceful companions.

Hector, with his axe, soon lopped boughs from one of the adjacent pines, which Louis sharpened with his knife and, with Catharine's assistance, drove into the ground, arranging them in such a way as to make the upturned oak, with its roots and the earth which adhered to them, form the back part of the hut, which when completed formed by no means a contemptible shelter. Catharine then cut fern and deer grass with Louis's *couteau de chasse*, which he always carried in a sheath at his girdle, and spread two beds,—one, parted off by dry boughs and bark, for herself, in the interior of the wigwam; and one for her brother and cousin, nearer the entrance. When all was finished to her satisfaction she called the two boys, and, according to the custom of her parents, joined them in the lifting up of their hands as an evening sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Nor were these simple-hearted children backward in imploring help and protection from the Most High. They earnestly prayed that no dangerous creature might come near to molest them during the hours of darkness and helplessness, no evil spirit visit them, no unholy or wicked thoughts intrude into their

minds; but that holy angels and heavenly thoughts might hover over them, and fill their hearts with the peace of God which passeth all understanding. And the prayer of the poor wanderers was heard; they slept in peace, unharmed, in the vast solitude. So passed their first night on the Plains.

CHAPTER II

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"Fear not: ye are of more value than many sparrows."—
St. Luke.

The sun had risen in all the splendour of a Canadian summer morning when the sleepers arose from their leafy beds. In spite of the novelty of their situation, they had slept as soundly and tranquilly as if they had been under the protecting care of their beloved parents, on their little palliasses of corn straw; but they had been cared for by Him who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth, and they waked full of youthful hope, and in fulness of faith in His mercy into whose hands they had commended their souls and bodies before they retired to rest.

While the children slept in peace and safety, what terrors had filled the minds of their distracted parents! what a night of anguish and sorrow had they passed!

When night had closed in without bringing back the absent children, the two fathers, lighting torches of fat pine, went forth in search of the wanderers. How often did they raise their voices in hopes their loud halloos might reach the hearing of the lost ones! How often did they check their hurried steps to listen for some replying call! But the sighing breeze in the pine tops, or sudden rustling of the leaves

caused by the flight of the birds startled by the unusual glare of the torches, and the echoes of their own voices, were the only sounds that met their anxious ears. At daybreak they returned, sad and dispirited, to their homes, to snatch a morsel of food, endeavour to cheer the drooping hearts of the weeping mothers, and hurry off, taking different directions. But, unfortunately, they had little clue to the route which Hector and Louis had taken, there being many cattle-paths through the woods. Louis's want of truthfulness had caused this uncertainty, as he had left no intimation of the path he purposed taking when he quitted his mother's house. He had merely said he was going with Hector in search of the cattle, giving no hint of his intention of asking Catharine to accompany them; he had but told his sick sister that he would bring home strawberries and flowers, and that he would soon return. Alas! poor, thoughtless Louis! how little did you think of the web of woe you were then weaving for yourself, and all those to whom you and your companions were so dear! Children, think twice ere ye deceive once.

Catharine's absence would have been quite unaccountable but for the testimony of Duncan and Kenneth, who had received her sisterly caresses before she joined Hector at the barn; and much her mother marvelled what could have induced her good, dutiful Catharine to have left her work and forsaken her household duties to go rambling away with the boys, for she never left the house when her mother was absent from it without her express permission. And now she was gone,—lost to them perhaps for ever. There stood the wheel she had been turning; there

hung the untwisted hanks of yarn, her morning task; and there they remained week after week, and month after month, untouched,—a melancholy memorial to the hearts of the bereaved parents of their beloved.

It were indeed a fruitless task to follow the agonized fathers in their vain search for their children, or to paint the bitter anguish that filled their hearts as day passed after day, and still no tidings of the lost ones. As hope faded, a deep and settled gloom stole over the sorrowing parents, and reigned throughout the once cheerful and gladsome homes. At the end of a week the only idea that remained was, that one of these three casualties had befallen the lost children,—death, a lingering death by famine; death, cruel and horrible, by wolves or bears; or, yet more terrible, with tortures by the hands of the dreaded Indians, who occasionally held their councils and hunting-parties on the hills about the Rice Lake, which was known only by the elder Perron as the scene of many bloody encounters between the rival tribes of the Mohawks and Chippewas. Its localities were scarcely ever visited by the settlers, lest haply they should fall into the hands of the bloody Mohawks, whose merciless disposition made them in those days a by-word even to the less cruel Chippewas and other Indian nations.

It was not in the direction of the Rice Lake that Maxwell and his brother-in-law sought their lost children; and even if they had done so, among the deep glens and hill passes of what is now commonly called the Plains, they would have stood little chance of discovering the poor wanderers. After many days of fatigue of body and distress of mind, the sorrowing parents sadly relinquished the search as utterly

hopeless, and mourned in bitterness of spirit over the disastrous fate of their first-born and beloved children. "There was a voice of woe, and lamentation, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, because they were not."

The miserable uncertainty that involved the fate of the lost ones was an aggravation to the sufferings of the mourners. Could they but have been certified of the manner of their deaths, they fancied they should be more contented; but, alas! this fearful satisfaction was withheld

"Oh, were their tale of sorrow known,
'Twere something to the breaking heart;
The pangs of doubt would then be gone,
And fancy's endless dreams depart."

But let us quit the now mournful settlement of Cold Springs, and see how it really fared with the young wanderers.

When they awoke, the valley was filled with a white creamy mist, that arose from the bed of the stream (now known as Cold Creek), and gave an indistinctness to the whole landscape, investing it with an appearance perfectly different to that which it had worn by the bright, clear light of the moon. No trace of their footsteps remained to guide them in retracing their path, so hard and dry was the stony ground that it left no impression on its surface. It was with some difficulty they found the creek, which was concealed from sight by a lofty screen of gigantic hawthorns, high-bush cranberries, poplars, and birch trees. The hawthorn was in blossom, and gave out a sweet perfume, not less fragrant