

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Kipling Doyle
Baum Henry Flaubert Nietzsche Willis
Leslie Dumas Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Twain
Darwin Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato
Potter Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Harte
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The Young Fur Traders

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PEEFACE.

In writing this book my desire has been to draw an exact copy of the picture which is indelibly stamped on my own memory. I have carefully avoided exaggeration in everything of importance. All the chief, and most of the minor incidents are facts. In regard to unimportant matters, I have taken the liberty of a novelist—not to colour too highly, or to invent improbabilities, but—to transpose time, place, and circumstance at pleasure; while, at the same time, I have endeavoured to convey to the reader's mind a truthful impression of the *general effect*—to use a painter's language—of the life and country of the Fur Trader.

EDINBURGH, 1856.

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CHAPTER I.

Plunges the reader into the middle of an Arctic winter; conveys him into the heart of the wildernesses of North America; and introduces him to some of the principal personages of our tale.

Snowflakes and sunbeams, heat and cold, winter and summer, alternated with their wonted regularity for fifteen years in the wild regions of the Far North. During this space of time the hero of our tale sprouted from babyhood to boyhood, passed through the usual amount of accidents, ailments, and vicissitudes incidental to those periods of life, and finally entered upon that ambiguous condition that precedes early manhood.

It was a clear, cold winter's day. The sunbeams of summer were long past, and snowflakes had fallen thickly on the banks of Red River. Charley sat on a lump of blue ice, his head drooping and his eyes bent on the snow at his feet with an expression of deep disconsolation.

Kate reclined at Charley's side, looking wistfully up in his expressive face, as if to read the thoughts that were chasing each other through his mind, like the ever-varying clouds that floated in the winter sky above. It was quite evident to the most careless observer that, whatever might be the usual temperaments of the boy and girl, their present state of mind was not joyous, but on the contrary, very sad.

"It won't do, sister Kate," said Charley. "I've tried him over and over again—I've implored, begged, and entreated him to let me go; but he won't, and I'm determined to run away, so there's an end of it!"

As Charley gave utterance to this unalterable resolution, he rose from the bit of blue ice, and taking Kate by the hand, led her over

the frozen river, climbed up the bank on the opposite side—an operation of some difficulty, owing to the snow, which had been drifted so deeply during a late storm that the usual track was almost obliterated—and turning into a path that lost itself among the willows, they speedily disappeared.

As it is possible our reader may desire to know who Charley and Kate are, and the part of the world in which they dwell, we will interrupt the thread of our narrative to explain.

In the very centre of the great continent of North America, far removed from the abodes of civilised men, and about twenty miles to the south of Lake Winnipeg, exists a colony composed of Indians, Scotsmen, and French-Canadians, which is known by the name of Red River Settlement. Red River differs from most colonies in more respects than one—the chief differences being, that whereas other colonies cluster on the sea-coast, this one lies many hundreds of miles in the interior of the country, and is surrounded by a wilderness; and while other colonies, acting on the Golden Rule, export their produce in return for goods imported, this of Red River imports a large quantity, and exports nothing, or next to nothing. Not but that it *might* export, if it only had an outlet or a market; but being eight hundred miles removed from the sea, and five hundred miles from the nearest market, with a series of rivers, lakes, rapids, and cataracts separating from the one, and a wide sweep of treeless prairie dividing from the other, the settlers have long since come to the conclusion that they were born to consume their own produce, and so regulate the extent of their farming operations by the strength of their appetites. Of course, there are many of the necessaries, or at least the luxuries, of life which the colonists cannot grow—such as tea, coffee, sugar, coats, trousers, and shirts—and which, consequently, they procure from England, by means of the Hudson's Bay Fur Company's ships, which sail once a year from Gravesend, laden with supplies for the trade carried on with the Indians. And the bales containing these articles are conveyed in boats up the rivers, carried past the waterfalls and rapids overland on the shoulders of stalwart voyageurs, and finally landed at Red River, after a rough trip of many weeks' duration. The colony was founded in 1811, by the Earl of Selkirk, previously to which it had been a trading-post of the Fur Company. At the time of which we

write, it contained about five thousand souls, and extended upwards of fifty miles along the Red and Assiniboine rivers, which streams supplied the settlers with a variety of excellent fish. The banks were clothed with fine trees; and immediately behind the settlement lay the great prairies, which extended in undulating waves—almost entirely devoid of shrub or tree—to the base of the Rocky Mountains.

Although far removed from the civilised world, and containing within its precincts much that is savage and very little that is refined, Red River is quite a populous paradise, as compared with the desolate, solitary establishments of the Hudson's Bay Fur Company. These lonely dwellings of the trader are scattered far and wide over the whole continent—north, south, east, and west. Their population generally amounts to eight or ten men—seldom to thirty. They are planted in the thick of an uninhabited desert—their next neighbours being from two to five hundred miles off—their occasional visitors, bands of wandering Indians—and the sole object of their existence being to trade the furry hides of foxes, martens, beavers, badgers, bears, buffaloes, and wolves. It will not, then, be deemed a matter of wonder that the gentlemen who have charge of these establishments, and who, perchance, may have spent ten or twenty years in them, should look upon the colony of Red River as a species of Elysium, a sort of haven of rest, in which they may lay their weary heads, and spend the remainder of their days in peaceful felicity, free from the cares of a residence among wild beasts and wild men. Many of the retiring traders prefer casting their lot in Canada; but not a few of them *smoke* out the remainder of their existence in this colony—especially those who, having left home as boys fifty or sixty years before, cannot reasonably expect to find the friends of their childhood where they left them, and cannot hope to remodel tastes and habits long nurtured in the backwoods so as to relish the manners and customs of civilised society.

Such an one was old Frank Kennedy, who, sixty years before the date of our story, ran away from school in Scotland; got a severe thrashing from his father for so doing; and having no mother in whose sympathising bosom he could weep out his sorrow, ran away from home, went to sea, ran away from his ship while she lay at anchor in the harbour of New York, and after leading a wander-

ing, unsettled life for several years, during which he had been alternately a clerk, a day-labourer, a store-keeper and a village school-master, he wound up by entering the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, in which he obtained an insight into savage life, a comfortable fortune, besides a half-breed wife and a large family.

Being a man of great energy and courage, and moreover possessed of a large, powerful frame, he was sent to one of the most distant posts on the Mackenzie River, as being admirably suited for the display of his powers both mental and physical. Here the small-pox broke out among the natives, and besides carrying off hundreds of these poor creatures, robbed Mr. Kennedy of all his children save two, Charles and Kate, whom we have already introduced to the reader.

About the same time the council which is annually held at Red River in spring for the purpose of arranging the affairs of the country for the ensuing year thought proper to appoint Mr. Kennedy to a still more outlandish part of the country—as near, in fact, to the North Pole as it was possible for mortal man to live—and sent him an order to proceed to his destination without loss of time. On receiving this communication, Mr. Kennedy upset his chair, stamped his foot, ground his teeth, and vowed, in the hearing of his wife and children, that sooner than obey the mandate he would see the governors and council of Rupert's Land hanged, quartered, and boiled down into tallow! Ebullitions of this kind were peculiar to Frank Kennedy, and meant *nothing*. They were simply the safety-valves to his superabundant ire, and, like safety-valves in general, made much noise but did no damage. It was well, however, on such occasions to keep out of the old fur-trader's way; for he had an irresistible propensity to hit out at whatever stood before him, especially if the object stood on a level with his own eyes and wore whiskers. On second thoughts, however, he sat down before his writing-table, took a sheet of blue ruled foolscap paper, seized a quill which he had mended six months previously, at a time when he happened to be in high good-humour, and wrote as follows:—

Letter

To the Governor and Council of Rupert's Land, Fort Paskisegun
Red River Settlement. June 15, 18—.

Gentlemen,—I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your favour of 26th April last, appointing me to the charge of Peel's River, and directing me to strike out new channels of trade in that quarter. In reply, I have to state that I shall have the honour to fulfil your instructions by taking my departure in a light canoe as soon as possible. At the same time I beg humbly to submit that the state of my health is such as to render it expedient for me to retire from the service, and I herewith beg to hand in my resignation. I shall hope to be relieved early next spring.—I have the honour to be, gentlemen, your most obedient, humble servant,

F. Kennedy.

"There!" exclaimed the old gentleman, in a tone that would lead one to suppose he had signed the death-warrant, and so had irrevocably fixed the certain destruction, of the entire council—"there!" said he, rising from his chair, and sticking the quill into the ink-bottle with a *dab* that split it up to the feather, and so rendered it *hors de combat* for all time coming.

To this letter the council gave a short reply, accepting his resignation, and appointing a successor. On the following spring old Mr. Kennedy embarked his wife and children in a bark canoe, and in process of time landed them safely in Red River Settlement. Here he purchased a house with six acres of land, in which he planted a variety of useful vegetables, and built a summer-house after the fashion of a conservatory, where he was wont to solace himself for hours together with a pipe, or rather with dozens of pipes, of Canadian twist tobacco.

After this he put his two children to school. The settlement was at this time fortunate in having a most excellent academy, which was

conducted by a very estimable man. Charles and Kate Kennedy, being obedient and clever, made rapid progress under his judicious management, and the only fault that he had to find with the young people was, that Kate was a little too quiet and fond of books, while Charley was a little too riotous and fond of fun.

When Charles arrived at the age of fifteen and Kate attained to fourteen years, old Mr. Kennedy went into his conservatory, locked the door, sat down on an easy chair, filled a long clay pipe with his beloved tobacco, smoked vigorously for ten minutes, and fell fast asleep. In this condition he remained until the pipe fell from his lips and broke in fragments on the floor. He then rose, filled another pipe, and sat down to meditate on the subject that had brought him to his smoking apartment. "There's my wife," said he, looking at the bowl of his pipe, as if he were addressing himself to it, "she's getting too old to be looking after everything herself (*puff*), and Kate's getting too old to be humbugging any longer with books: besides, she ought to be at home learning to keep house, and help her mother, and cut the baccy (*puff*), and that young scamp Charley should be entering the service (*puff*). He's clever enough now to trade beaver and bears from the red-skins; besides, he's (*puff*) a young rascal, and I'll be bound does nothing but lead the other boys into (*puff*) mischief, although, to be sure, the master *does* say he's the cleverest fellow in the school; but he must be reined up a bit now. I'll clap on a double curb and martingale. I'll get him a situation in the counting-room at the fort (*puff*), where he'll have his nose held tight to the grindstone. Yes, I'll fix both their flints to-morrow;" and old Mr. Kennedy gave vent to another puff so thick and long that it seemed as if all the previous puffs had concealed themselves up to this moment within his capacious chest, and rushed out at last in one thick and long-continued stream.

By "fixing their flints" Mr. Kennedy meant to express the fact that he intended to place his children in an entirely new sphere of action, and with a view to this he ordered out his horse and cariole [Foot-note: A sort of sleigh.] on the following morning, went up to the school, which was about ten miles distant from his abode, and brought his children home with him the same evening. Kate was now formally installed as housekeeper and tobacco-cutter; while Charley was told that his future destiny was to wield the quill in the

service of the Hudson's Bay Company, and that he might take a week to think over it. Quiet, warm-hearted, affectionate Kate was overjoyed at the thought of being a help and comfort to her old father and mother; but reckless, joyous, good-humoured, hare-brained Charley was cast into the depths of despair at the idea of spending the livelong day, and day after day, for years it might be, on the top of a long-legged stool. In fact, poor Charley said that he "would rather become a buffalo than do it." Now this was very wrong of Charley, for, of course, he didn't *mean* it. Indeed, it is too much a habit among little boys, ay, and among grown-up people, too, to say what they don't mean, as no doubt you are aware, dear reader, if you possess half the self-knowledge we give you credit for; and we cannot too strongly remonstrate with ourself and others against the practice— leading, as it does, to all sorts of absurd exaggerations, such as gravely asserting that we are "broiling hot" when we are simply "rather warm," or more than "half dead" with fatigue when we are merely "very tired." However, Charley *said* that he would rather be "a buffalo than do it," and so we feel bound in honour to record the fact.

Charley and Kate were warmly attached to each other. Moreover, they had been, ever since they could walk, in the habit of mingling their little joys and sorrows in each other's bosoms; and although, as years flew past, they gradually ceased to sob in each other's arms at every little mishap, they did not cease to interchange their inmost thoughts, and to mingle their tears when occasion called them forth. They knew the power, the inexpressible sweetness, of sympathy. They understood experimentally the comfort and joy that flow from obedience to that blessed commandment to "rejoice with those that do rejoice, and weep with those that weep." It was natural, therefore, that on Mr. Kennedy announcing his decrees, Charley and Kate should hasten to some retired spot where they could commune in solitude; the effect of which communing was to reduce them to a somewhat calmer and rather happy state of mind. Charley's sorrow was blunted by sympathy with Kate's joy, and Kate's joy was subdued by sympathy with Charley's sorrow; so that, after the first effervescing burst, they settled down into a calm and comfortable state of flatness, with very red eyes and exceedingly pensive minds. We must, however, do Charley the justice to say that the red eyes

applied only to Kate; for although a tear or two could without much coaxing be induced to hop over his sun-burned cheek, he had got beyond that period of life when boys are addicted to (we must give the word, though not pretty, because it is eminently expressive) *blubbering*.

A week later found Charley and his sister seated on the lump of blue ice where they were first introduced to the reader, and where Charley announced his unalterable resolve to run away, following it up with the statement that *that* was "the end of it." He was quite mistaken, however, for *that* was by no means the end of it. In fact it was only the beginning of it, as we shall see hereafter.

CHAPTER II.

The old fur-trader endeavours to "fix" his son's "flint," and finds the thing more difficult to do than he expected.

Near the centre of the colony of Red River, the stream from which the settlement derives its name is joined by another, called the Assiniboine. About five or six hundred yards from the point where this union takes place, and on the banks of the latter stream, stands the Hudson's Bay Company's trading-post, Fort Garry. It is a massive square building of stone. Four high and thick walls enclose a space of ground on which are built six or eight wooden houses, some of which are used as dwellings for the servants of the Hudson's Bay Company, and others as stores, wherein are contained the furs, the provisions which are sent annually to various parts of the country, and the goods (such as cloth, guns, powder and shot, blankets, twine, axes, knives, etc., etc.) with which the fur-trade is carried on. Although Red River is a peaceful colony, and not at all likely to be assaulted by the poor Indians, it was, nevertheless, deemed prudent by the traders to make some show of power; and so at the corners of the fort four round bastions of a very imposing appearance were built, from the embrasures of which several large black-muzzled guns protruded. No one ever conceived the idea of

firing these engines of war; and, indeed, it is highly probable that such an attempt would have been attended with consequences much more dreadful to those *behind* than to those who might chance to be in front of the guns. Nevertheless they were imposing, and harmonised well with the flag-staff, which was the only other military symptom about the place. This latter was used on particular occasions, such as the arrival or departure of a brigade of boats, for the purpose of displaying the folds of a red flag on which were the letters H. B. C.

The fort stood, as we have said, on the banks of the Assiniboine River, on the opposite side of which the land was somewhat wooded, though not heavily, with oak, maple, poplar, aspens, and willows; while at the back of the fort the great prairie rolled out like a green sea to the horizon, and far beyond that again to the base of the Rocky mountains. The plains at this time, however, were a sheet of unbroken snow, and the river a mass of solid ice.

It was noon on the day following that on which our friend Charley had threatened rebellion, when a tall elderly man might have been seen standing at the back gate of Fort Garry, gazing wistfully out into the prairie in the direction of the lower part of the settlement. He was watching a small speck which moved rapidly over the snow in the direction of the fort.

"It's very like our friend Frank Kennedy," said he to himself (at least we presume so, for there was no one else within earshot to whom he could have said it, except the door-post, which every one knows is proverbially a deaf subject). "No man in the settlement drives so furiously. I shouldn't wonder if he ran against the corner of the new fence now. Ha! just so — there he goes!"

And truly the reckless driver did "go" just at that moment. He came up to the corner of the new fence, where the road took a rather abrupt turn, in a style that insured a capsizing. In another second the spirited horse turned sharp round, the sleigh turned sharp over, and the occupant was pitched out at full length, while a black object, that might have been mistaken for his hat, rose from his side like a rocket, and, flying over him, landed on the snow several yards beyond. A faint shout was heard to float on the breeze as this catastrophe occurred, and the driver was seen to jump up and read-

just himself in the cariole; while the other black object proved itself not to be a hat, by getting hastily up on a pair of legs, and scrambling back to the seat from which it had been so unceremoniously ejected.

In a few minutes more the cheerful tinkling of the merry sleigh-bells was heard, and Frank Kennedy, accompanied by his hopeful son Charles, dashed up to the gate, and pulled up with a jerk.

"Ha! Grant, my fine fellow, how are you?" exclaimed Mr. Kennedy, senior, as he disengaged himself from the heavy folds of the buffalo robe and shook the snow from his greatcoat. "Why on earth, man, don't you put up a sign-post and a board to warn travellers that you've been running out new fences and changing the road, eh?"

"Why, my good friend," said Mr. Grant, smiling, "the fence and the road are of themselves pretty conclusive proof to most men that the road is changed; and, besides, we don't often have people driving round corners at full gallop; but —"

"Hollo! Charley, you rascal," interrupted Mr. Kennedy — "here, take the mare to the stable, and don't drive her too fast. Mind, now, no going off upon the wrong road for the sake of a drive, you understand."

"All right, father," exclaimed the boy, while a bright smile lit up his features and displayed two rows of white teeth: "I'll be particularly careful," and he sprang into the light vehicle, seized the reins, and with a sharp crack of the whip dashed down the road at a hard gallop.

"He's a fine fellow that son of yours," said Mr. Grant, "and will make a first-rate fur-trader."

"Pur-trader!" exclaimed Mr. Kennedy. "Just look at him! I'll be shot if he isn't thrashing the mare as if she were made of leather." The old man's ire was rising rapidly as he heard the whip crack every now and then, and saw the mare bound madly over the snow. "And see!" he continued, "I declare he *has* taken the wrong turn after all."