

H. A. CODY

***THE FRONTIERSMAN:
A TALE OF THE YUKON***

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The Frontiersman: A Tale of the Yukon

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THE FRONTIERSMAN

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CHAPTER I

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NIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS

Creek, swish! Creek, swish! hour after hour sounded forth the yielding snowshoes as Keith Steadman, hardy northman and trailsman, strode rapidly forward. For days he had listened to their monotonous music, as he wound his devious way over valleys, plains, and mountain passes, down toward the mighty Yukon River, pulsing on to the sea through the great white silence.

There was snow everywhere. Snow on the river, sparkling like a million diamonds; snow on the lakes, lying smooth and white. Snow on the trees, hanging in beautiful, fairy-like clusters; snow on the sun-kissed mountains, fleecy, golden, drifting. Snow, frosty, hard, surrounding the traveller, pouring into his lungs at every breath, clinging to his eyebrows, whitening his unkempt beard, and decorating the furry fringes of his loose parka.

"Cold night," he muttered to himself, as he paused to readjust the rope of the small sled he was drawing, to the right shoulder.

Then he glanced back over the trail, and a dark object arrested his attention, drawing nearer and nearer.

"A wolf! and on my track, too! I expected as much in this desolate spot," and the traveller unslung the small rifle from his back and stood ready for action.

For some time the animal did not look up, but kept its nose close to the ground, and trotted steadily on. Then it lifted its head, slowed down to a walk, and at length stopped.

"I don't like that brute on my track at this time of the day," thought Keith. "Perhaps a leaden message may give it a hint to travel elsewhere."

He raised his rifle to his shoulder and took aim. Then he lowered it, moved by some sudden impulse. "Why, I believe it's a dog, not a wolf at all," and he gave a sharp whistle to the watching animal.

The dog, for so it was, pricked up its ears, moved forward, and stopped; but no coaxing on the traveller's part could induce it to advance any further. After trying in vain for some time to make friends with the cur, Keith resumed his weary walk.

The short winter day was drawing to a close, and the sun had dipped behind a tall, hoary peak. The shadows stealing over the land warned him that night was shutting down, and camping time was near.

Ahead lay a clump of thick fir trees, which promised shelter and an abundance of wood. Toward this he moved, the dog following some distance behind. Reaching the place, it did not take him long to clear away the snow from a suitable spot, using one of his narrow snow-shoes as a shovel. This done, he built a fire from the dead trees standing close by, and prepared a generous supply of fuel to

last during the cold night. With much skill, acquired through long practice, he soon fashioned a cosy little nest on one side of the fire, from the richly-scented fir boughs. To make the shelter more complete, he erected in the background a brush barricade in the form of a semi-circle, a few feet high. In front of this he spread a wolf-skin robe.

"A palace fit for a king," he remarked, half aloud, as he glanced around upon his handiwork. "Now for supper."

A little bacon, a few beans, a taste of sourdough bread, with some black tea for a relish, formed the humble repast.

In the meantime the dog had crept close, attracted by the warm, bright fire, and stood looking wistfully upon the bacon lying before him.

"Hungry, old boy, eh?" asked Keith. "You look as if you had eaten nothing for a month. Well, then, here's a piece of bacon and bread. To-morrow I'll try to snip a rabbit for you."

The ravenous beast seized eagerly the precious morsels, devoured them with a gulp or two, and looked longingly for more.

"Can't do it, doggie," said Keith, noticing the animal's beseeching eyes, "I've only a little left, and a hard trail lies ahead."

Then something around the dog's neck arrested his attention. It was a small object fastened to a rude collar. What could it be?

"Come here, laddie," he called, "and let me see what you've got there."

The cur, however, kept at a safe distance, but showed a degree of friendliness by short jerks of his tail.

"Perhaps a piece of bacon will bring him," and Keith held a portion temptingly before his view.

The dog pricked up his ears, advanced, drew back, and looked around. Then, squatting down upon his haunches, he lifted his nose into the air and gave vent to a most doleful howl.

"Come on, old boy," encouraged Keith, still holding the bacon between his fingers.

Little by little the dog approached, and with much coaxing was induced to draw near, and after a time nestled by the man's side, where he quickly devoured the coveted morsel of food.

"Now, let's see what you've got here," and Keith examined the object attached to the collar.

It was a piece of brown paper, old and soiled, and evidently it had seen hard usage. It was carefully folded, and tied with twine made up of several short pieces. With the point of his hunting knife, Keith cut the string, and when he had opened the paper he beheld a number of words, scrawled with some red material, which looked much like blood. By the flickering camp fire he managed with difficulty to decipher the following startling message:

"For God's sake, help. I'm dying."

That was all, and for some time Keith held the paper in his hand and gazed steadily into the fire.

"Strange," he mused. "Where could the animal have come from? I did not know there was a white man near. But it must be some poor wretch who has been stranded in this desolate region. Let me see. That dog could not have travelled far in his present miserable condition. I believe I

could track him, and perhaps find his master either dead or alive. But then that would mean great delay, and I hoped with hard travelling to reach Klassan by to-morrow night. Besides, there is not much food left, only a little bacon, bread, and a few beans. Oh, well, I'll sleep on it, and in the morning perhaps I may see more clearly."

The fire roared cheerfully, seizing with avidity upon the dry fir sticks. The sparks shot up into the darkness, whirling, twisting, and dancing, like so many happy fairies. The tall trees stood out in bold relief, sombre and silent. "Yes," he mused, "I believe it's a warning, and I must no longer hesitate. That poor fellow needs help, and no doubt this dog was guided by some good angel. I must go as soon as the day breaks, and leave the matter of food to the Father's care."

With the fire well replenished, and the loaded rifle close at hand, Keith rolled himself up in his wolf-skin robe and was soon fast asleep.

It seemed that he had lain but a short time, when he was aroused by a weight pressing against his body, accompanied by a startling noise. Half dazed, he lifted himself to a sitting posture and looked around. The fire was almost out and the charred sticks were emitting but a feeble glow. The weight against his body was caused by the dog, huddling near as possible and growling in the most ferocious manner. It did not take long to understand the creature's terror, for a sound fell upon his ears which caused his heart to beat fast and a cold chill to pass through his body. Out of the darkness came the long-drawn howls, which he easily recognized. They were wolves, drawing nearer and nearer,

how many he could not tell. Quickly throwing a few fresh sticks on the smouldering embers, he seized his rifle, examined it carefully, and looked to the keen knife in his belt.

"Never mind," he remarked to the crouching form at his feet. "We'll give them a warm reception, at any rate."

"O-o-o-ow. O-o-o-ow," came those awful sounds, at any time terrible to hear, but at night in the lonely wild, how appalling!

Keith strained his eyes through the darkness in an effort to catch a glimpse of the enemy. That they were bearing down upon him there was no doubt. But look as he might nothing was to be observed except the trees standing silently around. Presently the howlings ceased, and all was still. What did this signify? That the wolves had gone on some other scent? Ah, no. Keith was too well accustomed to the ways of these creatures to believe such a thing. He knew that the stillness was but a prelude to the storm; that the animals were stalking their prey; that gleaming eyes were watching his slightest movement, and that keen white fangs were bared, ready to tear him to pieces.

Not for an instant did he abate his watchfulness, and ere long he beheld savage eyes, glowing like fiery balls, peering out of the night. Nearer and nearer they drew, until the forms of the animals could be dimly discerned. Then he brought the rifle to his shoulder, took careful aim, and fired. Instantly a sharp yell split the darkness, followed by fierce, snarling sounds, which plainly told that the fallen brute was being devoured by its ravenous companions.

So quickly had all this taken place that before Keith had time for a second shot, or even to throw out the empty shell and drive a loaded one home, a huge beast sprang full upon him from the left. Instinctively he leaped aside, and the wolf, missing his prey, landed upon the fire only a short distance away. A cry of mingled pain and rage ensued as the creature's feet touched the hot coals. Then followed a scattering of sticks as the animal shot out of the fire and bounded off into the depths of the forest.

So sudden was the attack, and unexpected the deliverance, that Keith stared in amazement. Then a smile passed over his face at the thought of the wolf's surprise, and the spectacle of his hurried retreat. His merriment, however, was of short duration. There was stern work still ahead.

So intent was he on peering into the darkness after the fleeing form that he did not notice another large brute slinking stealthily up on his right. With a snarl it sprang straight at him, and before Keith could lift a hand in self-defence he staggered back, tripped over a twig, and fell heavily to the ground. With one hand he seized the wolf by the throat with a vise-like grip, while with the other he endeavored in vain to draw forth his hunting knife.

At this critical moment the dog, which up to this time had presented the appearance of abject terror, aroused suddenly to action. It rushed upon the wolf like the incarnation of fury, and sinking its teeth into the monster's side began to tear the quivering flesh.

Assailed from this new quarter, the wolf tried to turn back upon the dog. This effort partly relieved the weight

from Keith's body and enabled him to grip the handle of his trusty knife. It took but an instant to rip it from its sheath and plunge the keen, glittering point into his antagonist's side. With a yell of pain the wolf attempted to escape. It was too late; the blow had been sure, and ere long he was quivering in death upon the ground, with the dog worrying him to the last.

Keith at once sprang for his rifle, thrust in a loaded shell, and stood awaiting the next move of his savage enemy.

CHAPTER II

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ABANDONED

All through the dark hours of the night Keith kept watch, with the anxious dog growling intermittently at his feet. He knew there were wolves still in the vicinity, for at times he could hear their ugly snarls near the spot where their companion had fallen.

Slowly the hours wore away, and at length the dawn began to steal over the land. It needed but a little light to show the dim forms of three wolves squatting on the snow some distance off. Bringing his rifle to his shoulder, Keith sent a ball straight through the heart of the largest, which bounded into the air, and then rolled over on the snow dead. The other two started up in surprise, but a second shot brought one of them to the ground, while his

companion, bold brute though he was, turned and fled. Thus the weary watch and the fight were over, and Keith breathed a prayer of thankfulness at his escape from the blood-thirsty foe.

Long before the sun had made its appearance, man and dog were retracing their steps over the trail they had traversed the previous evening. It meant much to turn back and thread their way across that desolate waste of snow, through dreary forests, level plains, and sweeping lakes.

Hour after hour they moved, Keith all the time keeping a sharp look-out for signs to show where the dog had taken his trail. Tracks of various kinds were plentiful, crossing and re-crossing one another in the most confusing manner. It was certainly a puzzling task to choose the ones which would lead him to his destination.

Slowly he proceeded, peering here and there for some solution of the mystery. In this manner he had advanced a considerable distance, when the whining of the dog caused him to glance back. The animal had stopped, and seemed to be in trouble, looking first at the man, and then away to the left. Wondering what was the matter, Keith returned to the spot.

"Well, doggie," he exclaimed, "what's wrong?"

But the cur continued to whine, looking alternately to the left and up into the man's face.

Suddenly a thought flashed into Keith's mind. Perhaps the brute was calling his attention to the right trail. It was worth investigating at any rate.

The dog seemed to read his thoughts, and, weak though he was, gave a joyful bark, and bounded off in the direction

toward which he had been looking.

"There's something in this after all," mused Keith, as he followed hard after.

Away in the distance a range of mountains stood out bold and austere against the sky. At a certain place a break appeared, one of Nature's vast passes, and toward this the dog made his way. Ahead lay a large, open plain, devoid of trees. Across this they travelled to a forest beyond, which clothed the base of the mountains. The trees were large and resembled a vast, silent army wedged into the valley, as if forbidding any progress that way.

But the dog was not thinking of the trees, nor how grand they looked in their soft, snowy mantle. He had something else on his mind, and with firm assurance he nosed his way into their sombre depths.

For two hours they threaded the forest, up the long, winding valley, when at length a log cabin burst suddenly into view. It was small, low, and evidently had been built for some time. A stream of smoke, curling into the frosty air, betokened life within. Around the building many tracks of animals were visible, while here and there human footprints could be discerned.

There was no window to the shack, and the door was small and low. At this he knocked, while the dog scratched in his eagerness to gain admittance. No sound coming from within, Keith cautiously opened the rough barrier and entered, the cur leaping in ahead. The room was quite light from a fire burning in a rude stone fire-place, before which crouched a weird form, with knees drawn up to the chin in Indian fashion. Hair, long and unkempt, fell down over his

neck, and a beard, months old, was rough and straggling. The cheeks were hollow, and the weary, sunken eyes, turned toward the door, were filled with alarm. It was only the dog he saw, which had rushed forward, and was leaping around him in the wildest excitement, licking his hands and face with intense fondness.

The man, however, did not recognize the animal, but drawing his blanket more closely around his body, huddled down in a terrified manner.

"Back, back!" he moaned. "Don't come near! For God's sake, spare me! Don't touch me! Help! Father! Connie!"

The tears streamed down the poor creature's cheeks, as he crouched there on the floor, pleading with an imaginary foe. The scene was pitiable to behold, and Keith hastened to his side.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "The dog won't hurt you."

The man started and looked up in a dazed manner. Then he reached forward with his long, bony fingers.

"Save me!" he moaned. "Drive them away! They will kill me!"

"Why, there's nothing to harm you," Keith replied. "It's your own dog come back to you, and he's licking your hands and face in his delight."

A gleam of intelligence stole into the man's eyes, as he looked slowly around, somewhat relieved.

"My dog?" he continued. "Brisko? Not wolves?"

"No, not a wolf near. You are safe."

The man trembled. He caught Keith by the hand. He looked up into his face, and then, throwing his arms around the dog's neck, wept like a child.

"Safe, safe," he murmured. "Thank God! Oh, how they howled!" and a shudder shook his frame. "They tore at the roof; they scratched at the door. My God, it was awful! And to think that he left me to those devils!"

Then he leaned eagerly forward. "Did you see him? Did you meet him on the trail?"

"Meet whom?" demanded Keith, thinking the man was wandering in his mind.

"Bill; Bill, my partner."

"No, I have not met any one for days."

"Are you sure?" and the man crept near, and looked into the traveller's face in a beseeching manner. "Think hard. A man with a long beard, and the Devil's face."

"No, I tell you I have met no one. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, God, help me! You didn't see him, and he's got my gold! Yes, *my* gold," he cried, grinding his teeth in his rage. "Look, you. Listen. We were partners, Bill and I. We struck gold. To find it we struggled hard. We tore the flesh from our hands on the rocks. Our feet bled. We suffered hunger and cold; but we found it. It was awful, but we found it. The trail was long, but we didn't mind; we had the gold. The wind howled down the mountain passes. We slept in the snow. For days we had little to eat, but we laughed, and hugged our pokes of gold, and kissed them as a mother kisses her babes. The dogs died one by one, except the leader there, and we ate them raw, like the wolves, which followed us and howled at night. But we laughed like ghosts, always laughed, for the gold was safe. We reached this cabin. Here we stayed, for we could go no further. We watched the gold,

counting it over and over. Then one day he left me,—left me to die—and took my gold."

The man's rage was terrible. His sunken eyes shot fire. His emaciated frame quivered with the intensity of his emotion. He staggered to his feet. "I will find him!" he cried. "Let me go to him!" He tried to walk to the door, but in vain. With a cry he fell upon the hard floor, groped for an instant like a blind man, and then lay perfectly still.

The days that followed the man's collapse were fearful ones. Keith would not leave him in such a condition, and he fought a hard battle to save his life. With the aid of rabbits, a few ptarmigan, grouse, and the little food he had brought with him, he managed to exist. Twice he left the cabin and scoured the forest for moose or deer, but the animals had deserted the locality. The wolves surrounded the shack at night, uttering their dreary cries, but kept warily out of gunshot.

At times the sick man moaned and raved pitifully. As Keith sat hour after hour by his side he tried to piece together something of his past life from the broken words which fell from his lips. Often it was of the trail, the gold, and Bill. But again he wandered to other scenes in which "Connie," "the violin," and various pieces of music played important parts.

"Connie. Connie," he would say, over and over again. "Where is my violin? Bring it to me."

At such moments his poor, gaunt fingers would search eagerly over the blanket to reach the imaginary instrument. So often did he mention "Connie," that Keith felt quite sure she must be his sister, and in his mind he pictured a sweet-

faced maiden, far away in some comfortable home, wondering, perhaps, when her brother would return.

One night, as he sat wearily at his post, something attracted his attention. It was a string fastened around the man's neck. Hoping to obtain some clue to his identity, he examined it closely, and found it held a small locket, hidden beneath the rough shirt. Opening the trinket, the beautiful face of a young woman was exposed to view. Long and earnestly he studied it, and, notwithstanding the wasted condition of the man lying before him, he could easily trace a marked resemblance between the two faces. Two letters, "K. R.," were neatly engraved upon the gold cover, but nothing else could he find which would reveal the man's name.

Carefully, almost reverently, he closed the locket, and restored it to its former position. But the sweet eyes which had looked forth at him still remained in his mind. The face burned itself into his soul, and twice during the night he again opened the locket, and studied the features most earnestly.

For ten long years he had not looked upon such a face, and to see this one before him brought back scenes of by-gone days. He remembered one, how pretty she looked on his graduation day, and what a thrill of pleasure he had experienced as she placed her delicate hand into his, and uttered words of congratulation. The future looked very bright then, and in all his visions that little woman stood out sweet and clear. But that was years ago, and now—she had been married long since to a portly, wealthy merchant, while he, no doubt, was forgotten.

At length, wearied out with watching, he threw several sticks upon the fire and lay down in front of it for a short nap. He awoke with a start, to find the fire low, and the form wrapped in the wolf-skin robe very still. A sense of dread crept over him, and, going to his side, he peered into that haggard face. Yes, it was still. The expression was one of peace, the awful peace of death. His right hand, firmly clutching the string of the little locket, was lying upon his breast. For him, at least, the long trail was ended.

CHAPTER III

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THE GRAVE IN THE SNOW

The sun of the short winter day was touching the mountain peaks, and slowly stealing down their rugged sides, as Keith emerged from the cabin bearing the cold body of the unknown man. He had a sacred task to perform, and he would not leave the place till all was completed. He had no winding sheet, no coffin in which to lay that silent form. A deep hole dug in the snow with the point of a snow-shoe, was grave and coffin combined, while the same soft, yielding snow spread tenderly over the body was the only winding sheet.

"I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord." How weird and strangely hollow sounded his voice in that lonely place, as he repeated from memory some of the beautiful

sentences of the Burial Service of the Church of England. There were none to respond, none to weep, and none to lay fresh flowers upon that snowy mound. There was one mourner, however; the lean dog, silent and wistful, crouching near. At times he glanced up into the speaker's face, as if trying to comprehend the meaning of the words.

"Poor dumb brute," said Keith, when the prayers were over, "you are faithful to the last. While this man was deserted, left here to die, you did what you could to save him. For this, Brisko, old boy, you shall have a home with me, or, I should say, an abiding place, for I hardly know the meaning of the word home."

Before leaving the cabin, Keith had searched long and carefully for some clue as to the dead man's identity. There was only the little locket, which he felt might some day help to explain the matter. Reluctantly he had unclosed the cold, stiff fingers from the slender string, and fastened the trinket around his own neck as the best place where it could be safely guarded.

When the body was well covered he sought for some way to mark the spot. A stick would stand but a short time; something else must serve. Presently an idea occurred to him. Near the grave a huge rock lifted itself several feet into the air, with a side so smooth and perpendicular that no snow could rest upon its surface. Going at once to the cabin, he brought forth the dead man's camping axe, and with the dull blade began to cut into the solid rock.

"Yes," he muttered to himself, "you shall have as solid and grand a monument as the world can afford. The grave is not pretty, I admit, and no hand will lay flowers over you.

But this stone will not tumble down till the finger of God touches it, and, I think," he added after a pause, "with this mark upon it He'll let it stand till the Judgment Day."

The mark was a large cross, not artistically done, but cut deep into the hard surface to withstand the wear of years. Beneath this he simply placed the two letters "K. R."

"Not too bad," he remarked, as he stepped back to view his handiwork. "It's the best I can do with such a rough tool, and I think *she* would be pleased to know that something marks the spot where he is lying."

Then, a strong dual feeling came over him. He longed to track the dead man's rascally partner, find him, and have the just punishment meted out upon his head. Next, to meet the original of the picture, restore the locket, and to tell the story of the death in the wilderness.

"What an appearance I would make," he mused, glancing at his rough buck-skin clothes, coarse leggings, and moccasined feet, while his right hand swept across his unkempt beard and long hair. "If she could see me now she would think I had murdered her brother instead of fighting hard to save his life."

Leaving the grave he returned to the cabin. Here he strapped his slender outfit on the small sled, and with snow-shoes on his feet left the place. He had advanced some distance when suddenly he remembered the dog. He stopped and gave a sharp whistle. Then he called, but the animal did not appear.

"Strange!" he thought. "What has happened to the brute? I must not leave him here."

Retracing his steps, he searched the cabin. Not finding him, he went to the grave, and there, lying on the snowy mound, he found the poor brute. His grief was plainly evident, and, as he lifted his head in response to Keith's call, sorrow, almost human, was depicted on his face. Only after much coaxing was he induced to leave the spot, abandon his old master, and cast in his lot with the new.

Together, at length, they set out upon the long trail; the man drawing the sled, the dog walking dejectedly behind. It was a dreary march over that desolate waste, as on and on they moved, two creeping specks. Nowhere, except it be upon the heaving ocean, does one feel more deeply his own insignificance than when alone in the great white North in midwinter. No human voice to break the awful silence; no song of bird or buzz of insect to fall upon the ear; thousands of miles from home, in a roadless wilderness.

As the second day was drawing to a close, Keith's weary steps quickened. He leaned eagerly forward, his strong, gaunt face filled with expectancy. Creak! Creak! How loudly the snow-shoes sounded at each swinging stride. The noise disturbed him. He stopped and listened intently. Then a look of disappointment passed over his countenance. His gaze swept the sky. The Northern Lights were streaming across the heavens like huge pennons flung out into a strong breeze. The unseen spirits of the North seemed to be marching and countermarching in vast battalions through the Arctic night. Their banners rose, faded, vanished; to reappear, writhing, twisting, curling, flashing forth in matchless beauty all the colours of the rainbow. Yellow and green, green and yellow, ruby-red and greenish-white,

chasing one another, vieing with one another as the great, silent army incessantly retreated and advanced.

Such scenes seldom failed to arouse in Keith the feeling of wonder and awe, but on this night he hardly noticed the grand display. He was watching the friendly stars as they tumbled out one by one. For long years they had been his steady companions on many a toilsome journey, and he read them like an open book. He saw the belted Orion swinging in its accustomed place, and the Great Bear dipping close to the horizon. It was seven o'clock, he felt sure of that, and yet that sound did not come. He advanced for some distance, halted, and again listened.

It was a cold night, and his breath pouring forth in clouds smote with a hissing sound upon the frosty air. He heeded it not. His parka hood was backward thrown to enable him to hear the better.

Presently dark forms loomed up out of the night, straight before him. "I was afraid of it," he muttered. "The rumor I heard was only too true, and they are here! May God help us!"

The objects which he beheld were log cabins, which he soon reached. No lights shone from the buildings, and the place seemed deserted. Passing among the houses he crossed an open space of ground, climbed a hill, and approached a long, low structure. He opened the door and entered. The place was in darkness, but quite warm. Soon he emerged, and looked around much puzzled. The Indian camps lay stretched out before him along the brink of the hill. These he visited one by one, but no sound greeted him except the occasional snarl or bark of a dog. What did it all

mean? He placed his hand to his forehead, and tried to think. Where were the miners? What had happened to the Indians? Why was the place deserted?

As he stood before one of the lodges, uncertain what to do, a cry fell upon his ear. Again it came, this time much lower. Keith peered through the darkness. He hurried down the hill. He saw a faint glimmer of light, and found it came from a log building directly before him. The clamour of voices, cries of rage and confusion, could be distinctly heard, as with fast beating heart he bounded forward. He guessed the truth, and knew there was no time to lose. He reached the door, and, scarcely waiting to lift the latch, he drove it open with one push of his powerful shoulder, and gazed upon the scene within.

CHAPTER IV

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"WHERE IS MY FLOCK?"

For long years the Indian village of Klassan had lain snugly ensconced between the sheltering arms of two towering mountains. Once, beyond the memory of the oldest native, the lodges had stood close to the small river Kaslo, which poured its icy waters into the mighty Yukon. But one mild spring night an ice jam in a deep, narrow gorge, pressed by the tremendous weight of water, gave way, and, rushing down, carried destruction to the little

Indian town, and to a number of the inhabitants. Since then the village stood further back at a higher elevation, secure from the devastating floods which occurred at frequent intervals. Here the Indians were living their wild life, sunk in degradation and superstition, when found by Keith Steadman, medical missionary from Eastern Canada. At the command of his veteran Bishop of the Mackenzie River, he had forced his way over the Rocky Mountains, sought out these wandering sheep of the wilderness, and for ten long years lived in their midst.

It was uphill work to root out old ideas, to plant new seeds, and to overcome the jealousy of the Medicine Men. Often his life was in great danger, but in the end he conquered and won the confidence of the natives.

With his own hands he assisted in erecting a log church and school room, decorating the interior of the former with beautiful designs and mottoes, much to the Indians' delight. In addition, there was the little bell, which arrived some years later, and swung in the small belfry, constructed of four long poles, by the side of the church. Since then its sweet tones had called the natives together at the appointed hour of seven. No matter how busily engaged they might be, all work was suspended, and they hastened to the sanctuary to offer up their devotions to the Great Father on high. At times Keith, returning from visits to outlying bands of Indians, hearing the sound of the bell some distance off, would know that all was well at the village.

During the summer of his tenth year at Klassan, he was summoned to the Mackenzie River, to attend a Conference

of missionaries which was to be held there. It was a long journey, and he dreaded to leave his post for such a length of time. Before departing, however, he called the band together, committed them to care of the trusty native catechist, Amos, and received their promises of true allegiance.

Keith had been absent but a few weeks, when a crowd of miners struck Klassan. Prospectors had been roaming the land for years, and at length made several good discoveries along the Kaslo.

The white men came, fifty strong, from the Lower Yukon, built their cabins at Klassan close to the river, and began operations. The work of mining progressed rapidly, and much gold was secured. During the long winter evenings little could be done, so the men gathered at Jim Perdue's place, which was store and saloon combined, to gamble and to drink bad whiskey.

The latter was a strange concoction, manufactured on the spot, to take the place of the limited supply of whiskey which had been brought in from the outside. It was known generally as "hootch," though some called it "Forty-rod whiskey," from its supposed power of killing at that distance. It was formed of a large quantity of sugar of molasses, with a small percentage of dried fruit for flavouring, while ordinary sourdough was used for fermentation. When ready for use it was poured into an empty kerosene tin, and served hot or cold according to the taste of the customer.

This nearness of the miners was a severe test of the Indians' loyalty. At first they kept much aloof from the

newcomers, and remained firm to their absent teacher and pastor. But at length several weakened and were enticed into the saloon, where ere-long they were imitating the pernicious ways of the white men. Most of them, however, held their ground, especially the older ones, who stood faithfully by Amos in the time of trial.

The catechist was much grieved to see the young men drifting into such evil habits. He pleaded earnestly with them and induced a number to leave for their winter hunting grounds. But with others he had no influence; he had lost his control entirely.

Every night, however, at the appointed hour the mission bell rang out its full, clear summons, and the faithful few never failed to meet together in the little church. Then Amos would read the prayers in the rhythmical Indian dialect, and give a brief address of exhortation.

One night, before closing his remarks, he said to them, "To-morrow, I go to visit my traps, and to track a moose which I know is near. I may be a little late in getting back, so I ask Paul Nitsi to build the fire, ring the bell, and have everything ready when I come."

This was received with nods of approval, and after a few more words they separated.

That same night a very different scene was being enacted in Perdue's store. Cards and drinks formed the order of the evening.

"Ding, dong. Ding, dong. Ding, dong," sounded out the little bell.

"D—n that bell!" cried Bill Pritchen, a stranger, bringing his fist down upon the table with a bang. "I wonder you men