

As they gained confidence, however, they shewed an excessive curiosity, and stared at us in the most earnest manner. We now led them to the camp, and I gave, as was my custom, the first who had approached, a tomahawk ; and to the others, some pieces of iron hoop. Those who had crossed the river amounted to about thirty-five in number. At sunset, the majority of them left us ; but three old men remained at the fire-side all night. I observed that few of them had either lost their front teeth or lacerated their bodies, as the more westerly tribes do. The most loathsome diseases prevailed among them. Several were disabled by leprosy, or some similar disorder, and two or three had entirely lost their sight. They are, undoubtedly, a brave and a confiding people, and are by no means wanting in natural affection. In person, they resemble the mountain tribes. They had the thick lip, the sunken eye, the extended nostril, and long beards, and both smooth and curly hair are common among them. Their lower extremities appear to

bear no proportion to their bust in point of muscular strength ; but the facility with which they ascend trees of the largest growth, and the activity with which they move upon all occasions, together with their singularly erect stature, argue that such appearance is entirely deceptive.

Our intercourse with the natives had now been constant. We had found the interior more populous than we had any reason to expect; yet as we advanced into it, the population appeared to increase. It was impossible for us to judge of the disposition of the natives during the short interviews we generally had with them, and our motions were so rapid that we did not give them time to form any concerted plan of attack, had they been inclined to attack us. They did not, however, shew any disposition to hostility, but, considering all things, were quiet and orderly, nor did any instances of theft occur, or, at least, none fell under my notice. The most loathsome of diseases prevailed through-

out the tribes, nor were the youngest infants exempt from them. Indeed, so young were some, whose condition was truly disgusting, that I cannot but suppose they must have been born in a state of disease; but I am uncertain whether it is fatal or not in its results, though, most probably it hurries many to a premature grave. How these diseases originated it is impossible to say. Certainly not from the colony, since the midland tribes alone were infected. Syphilis raged amongst them with fearful violence; many had lost their noses, and all the glandular parts were considerably affected. I distributed some Turner's cerate to the women, but left Fraser to superintend its application. It could do no good, of course, but it convinced the natives we intended well towards them, and, on that account, it was politic to give it, setting aside any humane feeling.

In the course of the afternoon the old man joined us, and got into the boat. As far as we could understand from his signs, we were at no great distance from some remarkable change or other. The river had been making to the N.W., from the commencement of the fossil formation, and it appeared as if it was inclined to keep that direction. The old man pointed to the N.W., and then placed his hand on the side of his head to indicate, as I understood him, that we should sleep to the N. W. of where we then were; but his second motion was not so intelligible, for he pointed due south, as if to indicate that such would be our future course; and he concluded his information, such as it was, by describing the roaring of the sea, and the height of the waves. It was evident this old man had been upon the coast, and we were therefore highly delighted at the prospect thus held out to us of reaching it.

The old man, whose information had proved strictly correct, joined us again on the 4th, and his joy at being received into the boat was unbounded, as well as the pleasure he expressed at again meeting Hopkinson. He had been a long journey, it would appear, for he had not then reached his tribe. As we approached

their haunt, he landed and preceded us to collect them. We were, of course, more than usually liberal to so old a friend, and we were really sorry to part with him.

Upon the first of these hills, we observed a large body of natives, who set up the most terrific yells as we approached. They were fully equipped for battle, and, as we neared the shore, came down to meet us with the most violent threats. I wished much to communicate with them, and, not without hopes of quieting them, stood right in with the intention of landing. I observed, however, that if I did so, I should have to protect myself. I hauled a little off, and endeavoured, by holding up a branch and a tomahawk, to gain their confidence, but they were not to be won over by any shew of pacification. An elderly man walked close to the water's edge unarmed, and, evidently, directed the others. He was followed by seven or eight of



the most daring, who crept into the reeds, with their spears shipped to throw at us. I, therefore, took up my gun to return their salute. It then appeared that they were perfectly aware of the weapon I carried, for the moment they saw it, they dashed out of their hiding place and retreated to the main body; but the old man, after saying something to them, walked steadily on, and I, on my part, laid my firelock down again.

Just at this

moment, however, without our being aware of their approach, a large tribe of natives, with their spears, lined the bank, and took us most completely by surprise. At no time during this anxious journey were we ever so completely in their power, or in so defenceless a situation. It rained so hard, that our firelocks would have been of no use, and had they attacked us, we must necessarily have been slaughtered without committing the least execution upon them. Nothing, therefore, remained for us but to continue our exertions. It required only one strong effort to get the boat into still water for a time, but that effort was beyond our strength, and we stood in the stream, powerless and exhausted.

The natives, in the mean while, resting on their spears, watched us with earnest attention. One of them, who was sitting close to the water, at length called to us, and we immediately recognised the deep voice of him to whose singular interference we were indebted for our escape on the 23d of January. I desired Hopkinson to swim over to him, and to explain that we wanted assistance. This was given without hesitation ; and we at length got under the lea of the rock, which I have already described as being in the centre of the river. The natives launched their bark canoes, the only frail means they possess of crossing the rivers with their children. These canoes are of the simplest construction and rudest materials, being formed of an oblong piece of bark, the ends of which are stuffed with clay, so as to render them impervious to the water. With several of these they now paddled round us with the greatest care, making their spears, about ten feet in length, (which they use at once as poles and paddles,) bend nearly double in the water. We had still the most difficult part of the rapid to ascend, where the rush of water was the strongest, and where the decline of the bed almost amounted to a fall. Here the blacks could be of no use to us.