

Charles George Douglas Roberts



Around the Camp-fire

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CHAPTER I. OFF TO THE SQUATOOKS.—THE PANTHER AT THE PARSONAGE.—BEAR VS. BIRCH-BARK.

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It was toward the end of July, and Fredericton, the little New Brunswick capital, had grown hot beyond endurance, when six devoted canoeists—Stranion, Magnus, Queerman, Sam, Ranolf, and myself—heard simultaneously the voices of wild rapids calling to them from afar. The desire of the woods awoke in us. The vagrant blood that lurks in the veins of our race sprang up and refused to be still. The very next day we fled from the city and starched collars, seeking freedom and the cool of the wilderness.

It was toward Lake Temiscouata and the wilds of the Squatooks that we set our eager faces. In shirt-sleeves and moccasins we went. For convenience we had our clothes stitched full of pockets. Our three good birch canoes and our other *impedimenta* we put on board a flat-car at the station. And that same evening found us at the village of 2 Edmundston, where the Madawaska flows into the St. John at a point about one hundred and fifty miles above Fredericton.

Unless you are an experienced canoeman, skilled not only with the paddle but with the pole, and expert to run the roughest rapids, you should take a guide with you on the Squatook trip. You should go in the bow of your canoe, with a trusty Indian in the stern; one Indian and one canoe for

each man of the party. The art of poling a birch-bark against a stiff current is no easy one to acquire, and needs both aptitude and practice. Your Indian will teach you in the gentler waters; and the rest of the time you may lounge at your ease, casting a fly from side to side, and ever climbing on between the changing shores. But as for us, we needed no Indians. We were all six masters of canoe-craft. Each took his turn at the white spruce pole; and we conquered the currents rejoicing.

Temiscouata is a long, narrow lake just outside the boundaries of New Brunswick. It lies in the Province of Quebec; but its outlet is the Madawaska River, a New Brunswick stream. Our plan of proceeding was to take to the canoes at Edmundston, and pole fifteen miles up the Madawaska, make a portage of five miles across country to Mud Lake, follow Beardsley Brook, the outlet of Mud Lake, to its junction with the Squatook River, and then slip down this swift stream, with 3 its chain of placid expansions, till we should float out upon the waters of Toledi Lake. Toledi River would then receive us among its angry rapids and cascades, to eject us forcibly at last upon the great bosom of Temiscouata, whence we should find plain paddling back to Edmundston. This would make a round trip of, say one hundred and forty miles; and all of them, save the first fifteen, with the current.

At Edmundston that evening we pitched our tent beside the stream; and next morning, though it was raw and threatening, we made an early start. In one canoe went Stranion and Queerman; in the second, Sam and Ranolf; in the third, Magnus and myself. The bedding, extra clothing,

etc., laced up snugly in squares of oiled canvas, made luxurious seats, while the eatables were stowed in light, strong boxes built to fit the canoes.

The first day out is usually uneventful, and this was no exception. When adventures are looked for they pretty certainly fail to arrive. We reached the portage with an hour of daylight to spare, and there found an old log cabin, which saved us the necessity of pitching our tent. It was dry, well-ventilated, abundantly uncivilized. What a supper Stranion cooked for us! And then what a swarm of mosquitoes and midges flocked in to bid us welcome! We hedged ourselves about with a cordon of slow fires of cedar & bark, the smoke of which proved most distasteful to them, and almost equally so to us. And then with a clear blaze crackling before the open door, and our blankets spread on armfuls of spruce boughs, we disposed ourselves luxuriously for pipes and yarns.

Queerman drew a long, blissful whiff through his corn-cob, blew a succession of rings, and murmured like a great bumblebee,—

“The world is Vagabondia
To him who is a vagabond.”

“Who’ll tell us the first yarn?” inquired Sam, as his pipe drew freely.

“Stranion begins,” said Magnus quietly. Magnus was a man of few words; but when he opened his mouth, what he said went. He was apt to do more and say less than any one else in the party.

“Well, boys,” said Stranion, “if Magnus says so, here goes. What shall I talk about?”

“Who ever heard of Stranion talking about anything but panthers?” jeered Ranolf.

“Well,” assented Stranion, “there’s something in what you say. The other night I was thinking over the various adventures which have befallen me in my devotion to birch and paddle. It surprises me to find what a lot of scrapes I’ve got into with the panthers. The brutes seem to fairly haunt me. Of course fellows who every year go into the Squatook woods are bound to have adventures, 5 more or less. You get cornered maybe by an old bull-moose, or have a close shave with some excited bear, or strike an unusually ugly lynx, or get spilled out of the canoe when you’re trying to run Toledi Falls; but in my case it is a panther every time. Whenever I go into the woods there is sure to be one of these creatures sneaking around. I declare it makes me quite uneasy to think of it, though I’ve always got the best of them so far. I’ll bet you a trout there are one or two spotting me now from those black thickets on the mountain; and one of these days, if I don’t look sharp, they’ll be getting even with me for all the members of their family that I have cut off in their sins.”

“Oh, you go along!” exclaimed Sam. “You’re getting sentimental. I can tell you, I have killed more trout than you have panthers, and there’s no old patriarch of a trout going to get even with me!”

Sam’s practical remark went unheeded; and in a few moments Stranion resumed,—

“You see, boys, the beasts began to haunt me in my very cradle so to speak. Did any of you ever hear mother tell that story?”

“I have!” ejaculated Queerman; but the rest of us hastened to declare our ignorance.

“Very well,” said Stranion. “Queerman shall see that I stick to the facts.”

“Oh, boys, I’ve a heavy contract on hand then,” cried Queerman.

But Stranion blandly ignored him, and continued,—

“I’ll call this tale—

‘THE PANTHER AT THE PARSONAGE.’

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“You have all seen the old parsonage at the mouth of the Keswick River. That’s a historic edifice for you! Therein was I born. There were more trees around it then than now.

“At the mature age of ten months I moved away from that neighborhood, but not before the Indian devil, as the panther is called in that region, had found me out and marked me as a foreordained antagonist.

“One bright June morning, when I was about five months old, and not yet able to be much protection to my young mother, my father set out on one of his long parochial drives, and we were left alone,—no, not quite alone; there was Susan, the kitchen-girl, for company. That constituted the garrison of the parsonage on that eventful morning,—mother, Susan, and myself.

“I cannot say I *remember* what took place, but I have so often been told it that I feel as if I had taken an active part. Mother and I were sitting by an open window, down-stairs, looking out on the front yard, when suddenly mother called out sharply,—

“Susan, Susan! Come here and see what sort of a creature this is coming through the grove!”

“There was a frightened ring in my mother’s voice which brought Susan promptly to her side.

“Just then the ‘creature,’ which was long and low and stealthy, reached the garden fence. It mounted the fence gracefully, and paused to look about.

“With a horrified gasp, mother caught me to her bosom, and whispered,—

“‘It’s a tiger!’

“‘No’m,’ cried Susan, ‘it ain’t no tiger; but it’s an Injun devil, which is pretty nigh as bad.’ And she ran and slammed down the window.

“The noise attracted the brute’s attention. He glanced our way, dropped to the ground, and crept stealthily toward the house.

“‘The attic!’ cried mother wildly. ‘All the windows downstairs are wide open.’

“I need hardly assure you, boys, it didn’t take those two women and me very long to get up-stairs. As we reached the top we heard a crash in the parlor, and mother nearly squeezed me to death in her terror for me; but Susan exclaimed almost gleefully,—

“‘I declare, if he ain’t got in the wrong winder! Parlor door’s shut!’

“By this time we were on the attic stairs; and the door at the foot of the stairs—a solid, old-fashioned country door—was safely bolted behind us.

“That door was the only means of access to the attic; and on the head of the stairs we all sat down to take breath.

Then in mother the anxious housewife began to reappear.

“‘What *was* that the horrid brute broke in the parlor, Susan?’ she queried.

“‘Must a’ been them dishes on the little table by the winder, ma’am,’ responded the girl.

“And then we heard a clatter again, as the beast, in springing out of the window, knocked the fragments of pottery aside.

“In a few moments he found another entrance. The soft *pat, pat* of his great furry feet could be heard on the lower stairs. He was evidently hungry, and much puzzled at our sudden disappearance.

“We could hear him sniffing around, in and out of the bedrooms, and at last that soft, persistent tread found its way to the attic door.

“How he did sniff about the bottom of that door till the blood of his prisoners ran cold with horror! Then he began to scratch, which was more than they could stand.

“Terror lent them invention, and mother put me into a basket of old clothes, while she helped Susan drag a heavy bedstead to the head of the stairs. This bedstead effectually blocked the narrow stairway, and when they had piled a chest of drawers on top of it they once more felt secure.

“All this trouble was unneeded, however, as 9 that door, opening outward, was an insurmountable barrier to the panther.

“In a few minutes he stole away restlessly. Then we heard some flower-pots, which stood on the window-ledge of the front bedroom, go crash on the steps below. The Indian devil was getting out of the window.

“Now, the attic in which we had taken refuge was lighted by two windows,—a small one in the gable, looking out upon the barnyard, and the other, a very small skylight, reached by a sort of fixed step-ladder from the attic floor.

“As soon as mother heard the animal’s claws on the side of the house, she thought of the skylight, and cried to Susan to shut it.

“The skylight had an outer shutter of wood, which was closed in winter-time to keep the heavy snowfall from breaking the glass.

“This shutter was now thrown back upon the roof, and the inner sash was raised a few inches for the sake of ventilation. Susan fairly flew up the ladder, and pulled out the little stick that supported the sash.

“She had barely got the hook slipped into the staple when the panther’s round head and big light eyes appeared within a foot of her face. She gave a startled shriek, and fell down the ladder.

“At this juncture the two women gave themselves up for lost; and mother, seizing an old 10 curtain-pole, which lay among the attic lumber, prepared to sell my infant life at a pretty high figure.

“All escape from the attic was blocked by the articles they had so carefully wedged into the stairway. This it would take them some time to clear.

“They never imagined that so fierce a brute as the panther could be stopped by an ordinary sash and glass, however strong.

“But the Indian devil is wary, and this one was suspicious of the glass. When, on attempting to put his head down

through the skylight, he met with an obstacle where he did not see any, he thought he detected a trap.

“He sniffed all over each pane, stopping every moment to eye us angrily. Then he scratched, but very gingerly, at the sash, and only tore away some splinters. The sash was stout and new.

“At last he thrust his muzzle over roughly against the pane, and his nose went through the glass. Susan sank in a heap, while mother, with deadly purpose, grasped her curtain-pole, expecting instant attack.

“It was not to be so, however; for which the world is much to be congratulated. The panther cut his nose pretty severely on the broken glass, and shrank back, snarling viciously.

“He was more than ever convinced that the skylight was a trap, and would not trust his muzzle again in the opening.

“Observing the beast’s caution, mother plucked up new hope. She remembered having read that lions and tigers were afraid of fire, and forthwith she hit on a truly brilliant expedient.

“‘Get up, Susan,’ she commanded, ‘and be of some use. Go and light that lamp on your washstand, and bring it to me.’

“Susan obeyed with alacrity, cheered by the thought that there was anything left to do. When the lamp was brought, mother laid the chimney aside, and turned up the wick so as to give a flaring, smoky blaze. Then she handed the lamp back to Susan.

“‘Take it,’ she said, ‘and set it on the top of the ladder, right under the broken pane.’

“This was too much for poor Susan.

“‘Oh, I dasn’t—never!’ she whimpered, backing hastily out of her mistress’s reach.

“Mother regarded her with withering scorn, then turned and looked at me, where I lay close behind her in a basket of old clothes.

“Assuring herself that the panther could not get me in her absence, she seized the lamp and marched up the ladder with it. The panther growled most menacingly, and thrust his face down to the opening; but as the smoke and flame came under his nose, he snarled and drew back.

“On the very topmost step did mother deposit the lamp, where it blazed right up through the broken pane. As she turned down the ladder, the 12 panther’s claws were heard along the shingles, beating a reluctant retreat.

“In a moment or two he was heard on the shed, and then mother opened the skylight, reached out, and clapped down the wooden shutter. Susan’s courage revived.

“Now that the danger was over, mother picked me out of the basket, and gathered me again to her bosom, while Susan began to speculate on what the panther would be up to next. On this point she was not long left in doubt.

“In the corner of the barnyard was a pig-pen, inhabited at the time by a pig three months old. Presently the poor little pig set up a terrific squealing, and mother and Susan rushed to the gable window.

“As I have said before, this window commanded a view of the barnyard. The panther was on the roof of the pen, peering down through the cracks, and scratching vigorously

to gain an entrance. Baby had been denied him, but pork he was determined to have.

“The pig squealed in a way that mother trusted would alarm the neighborhood, and tried to hide himself in the straw from the reach of those pale, cruel eyes. At last the panther quitted the roof, and found the pen door. Here he paused a moment or two, suspecting another trap. Then, finding nothing suspicious, in he glided. There was one terrific squeal, and all was still.

“I fancy mother and Susan both wept, thinking how well the fate of poor piggie might have been their own—and mine.

“For a long while the two women kept watch at the window. At last the panther reappeared, walking very lazily, and licking his chops. He glanced at the house in a good-natured fashion, as if he bore us no grudge; cleaned his great face with one paw, sniffed the air thoughtfully in various directions, and then made off towards the woods; and we knew that our pig went with him.

“When he was well out of sight, mother and Susan removed the barricades and forsook the attic. You may be sure they fastened every window, kept a keen outlook, and went about their work in fear and trembling.

“When my father got home, in the middle of the afternoon, he heard the story before he could unharness the horse. Straightway he set out again, and organized a hunting-party among the neighbors. The party was armed with all sorts and conditions of weapons; but it bagged that panther before sundown, whereby was my mother much

consoled. And now, have I stuck to the facts?" said Stranion, turning to Queerman.

"To my surprise, you have!" responded the latter.

"Well," went on Stranion, unruffled, "since the panthers got after me so early, it's not much cause for wonder if they've kept it up."

At this moment a strange, unearthly, gurgling cry broke the night's stillness, and we started involuntarily.

"There is one of mine ancient enemies now," said Stranion. "I'm sure to fall foul of him tomorrow, and one or the other of us will rue the day!"

"Well," said Sam, "we all know it won't be Stranion!"

The story done, I rose and replenished the fire, while Magnus passed around a tin of hot coffee. A whippoorwill,—

"Threshing the summer dusk

With his gold flail of song,"

was heard in a hillside thicket, and Queerman cried,—

"Listen to him, boys!"

"No," said Stranion; "we'll now give our very best attention while Sam tells us one of his old bear stories."

"Indeed," said Sam with an indignant sniff; "I'll tell you one I never told before, and a true one at that. Now don't interrupt, for I intend to do it up in a somewhat literary fashion, to save the Old Man trouble in writing it down."

"Thank you kindly," said I. I was the official scribe of the party, and familiarly known as the Old Man, or simply O. M., for short.

"BEAR VS. BIRCH-BARK,"

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continued Sam, "is the title of my narrative. It was on the upper waters of the Oromocto River that the case of Bear vs. Birch-bark was decided. Thither had Alec Hammond and I betaken ourselves in our canoe to kill some Oromocto trout.

"The Oromocto is for the most part much less rapid than other trout rivers of New Brunswick; in fact, for long distances its current is quite sluggish, a characteristic finely suited to our indolence of mood. Paddling quietly, or poling when the water was swift, we soon left behind us all traces of civilization. Instead of beautiful open meadow shores shaded with here and there a mighty elm or ash, we entered the ruggedest parts of the original wilderness, where the soil was too barren and stony to tempt even a squatter, and where the banks were clothed with dark hemlocks to the water's edge. Sometimes these sombre woods gave back a space, and a wild confusion of many kinds of trees took their place,—pines, ash, birch, basswood, larch, and beech, mixed with fallen trunks and staring white boulders. Sometimes, again, in the midst of the most impenetrable forest a delightful little patch of interval, or dry waterside meadow, would open up before us, inviting us to pitch our tent amid its deep, soft grasses. Scattered through the grass were clumps of tall 16 wild lilies, their orange blossoms glowing amid the green; and around the stately heads of the wild-parsnips, which made the air heavy with rich perfume, fluttered and clung the silver-throated bobolinks. What wonder we rested when we came to these wilderness gardens whose possession there was none to dispute with us! We found that as a rule we might count upon an ice-cold

brook near by. Wherever such brooks flowed in, there would be a deep pool, or an eddy covered with foam-clusters, or a pebbly, musical rapid, which meant a day of activity for our rods and reels and flies.

“One day, after such a morning with the trout as had left our wrists well tired, we were inclined to give our rods a resting-spell. The afternoon was sultry and drowsy,—it was toward the close of July,—and Alec’s highest ambition was to take a long siesta in the tent-door, where an overhanging beech-tree kept off the sun, and a sweet breeze seemed to have established its headquarters. There was no wind elsewhere that I could perceive, yet round our tent a soft breath of it was wandering all the day.

“For my own part I didn’t feel like loafing or lotus-eating. The fever for specimens was upon me. I have an intermittent passion, as you know, for the various branches of natural history, and am given at times to collecting birds and plants and insects. This afternoon I had visions of gorgeous 17 butterflies, rare feathered fowl, and various other strangely lovely things thronging my brain, so I put into the canoe my gauze net and double-barrelled breech-loader, and set off up stream in a vague search after some novelty.

“Let me confess it, my taste was destined to be gratified beyond my hopes.

“Above our camping-ground the river for some distance was swift and deep. Beyond this it widened out, and became almost as motionless as a lake. Along these still reaches the shores were comparatively low, and less heavily wooded, with here and there a little corner of meadow, a bit of wet

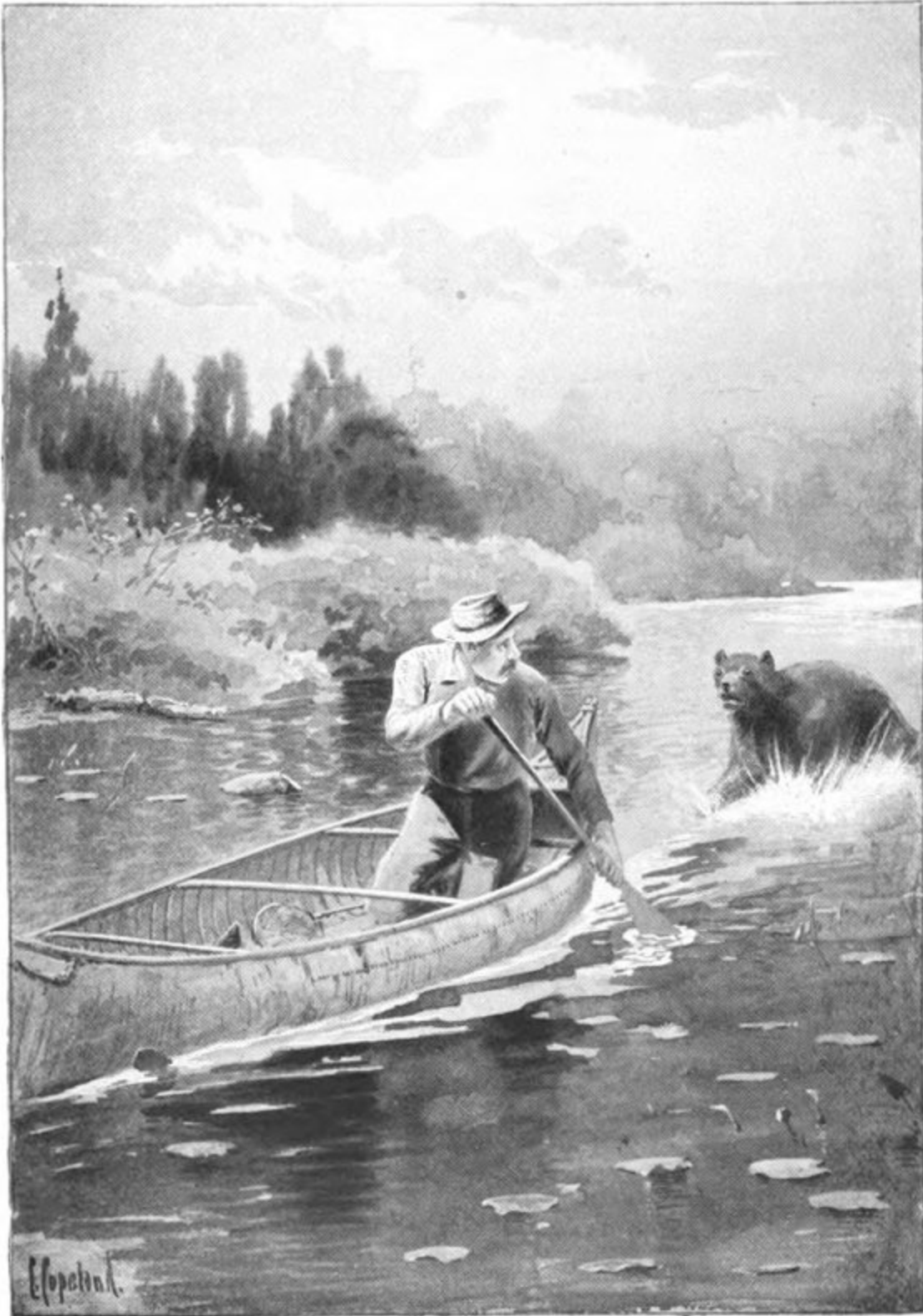
marsh covered with cat-tail flags, or a dense fragrant thicket of Indian willow. There were water-lily leaves in broad patches right across the stream; and the air was gay with green and purple dragon-flies, which lit on my gunwale, and glittered in the sun like jewels. There was not even a rustle of leaves to break the silence.

“At last, as I noiselessly rounded a low bushy point, right ahead I saw a splendid blue heron, which was watching intently for minnows in the shallow water. He spread his broad wings and rose instantly. I had just time to let him have one barrel as he disappeared over a thicket of alders, flying so low that his long legs swept their tops. I felt certain I had hit him, for straightway arose a great crackling and struggling among the bushes beyond. In my haste I failed to notice that this disturbance was rather too violent to be proceeding from any wounded bird, unless it were a dodo.

“Running my birch ashore alongside of a mouldering trunk which had fallen with half its length in the stream, I made my way, gun in hand, through the underwood, without stopping to load my empty barrel. There was no sign of blue herons where my bird was supposed to have fallen; but to my unlimited astonishment I beheld a black bear cub making off at his very best speed, badly scared.

“At my sudden appearance he gave a curious bleat of alarm, and redoubled his efforts to escape. He had little cause for alarm, however, as I did not want him for a specimen; and had I wanted him ever so much I could not well have bagged him with no heavier ammunition than bird-shot. I was watching his flight with a sort of sympathetic amusement when, with a most disagreeable

suddenness and completeness, the tables were turned upon me. In the underbrush behind me I heard a mighty crashing; and there to my dismay was the old she-bear, in a fine rage, rushing to the rescue of her offspring. Considering that the offspring's peril was not immediate, I thought she need not have been in such a tremendous hurry.



"I COULD HEAR THE ANIMAL PLUNGING IN PURSUIT."—Page 19.

“She had cut off my retreat. She was directly in the line of my sole refuge, my faithful and tried birch-bark. There was no time left for meditation. I darted straight toward the enemy. Undaunted by this boldness she rose upon her hind-legs to give me a fitting reception. When almost within her reach I fired my charge of bird-shot right in her face, which, not unnaturally, seemed somewhat to confuse her for a moment. It was a moment’s diversion in my favor. I made the most of it. I dashed past, and had gained some paces toward the canoe, when my adversary was again in full chase, more furious than ever. As I reached the canoe she sprang upon the other end of the log, and was almost aboard of me ere I could seize the paddle and thrust out.

“Fortunately I had headed down stream, for the mad brute took to the water without hesitation. Had the stream been deep I should merely have laughed at this, but in these shallows it was no laughing matter. The channel was deep enough to impede the bear’s running, but by no means to make running impossible. I felt that the question of speed between us was now a painfully doubtful one. My back bent to the paddle. The broad blade flashed through the water with all the force and swiftness I was master of. Close behind, though I could not spare time to look back, I could hear the animal plunging in pursuit, and I was drenched with the spray of her splashings. I was a skilful canoeist; I have won many races; but never was another canoe-race I was so bent upon winning as this one.

“At last, snatching a glance over my shoulder, I saw that I had gained, though but slightly. It was well I had, for the tremendous pace was one which I could keep up no longer. I

knew the deep water was still far ahead, and I knew, too, the obstinacy and tireless strength of my pursuer. There was, therefore, a grave uncertainty in my mind as to whether I could succeed in holding the lead much longer. I slackened a little, saving my strength all I could; but the bear at once made up her lost ground, and my breathing-space was brief. At a little short of my best, but still at a killing pace enough, I found I could keep out of reach. But if a shoal should come in the way, or a sunken log, or any like obstruction, the game was up. With this chance in view I had little leisure for watching my pursuer's progress. I could hear, however, and feel, quite too much of it.

"After what seemed an age of this desperate racing, we came to a part of the stream where I expected a change in my favor. For a quarter of a mile I would have a fair current, in a narrower and deeper channel. Here I gained ground at once. I relaxed my efforts a good deal, gave my aching arms a moment's rest, and watched the angry bear wallowing clumsily after me, able now neither to run nor swim. This ended the matter, I fondly imagined, and I drew a long sigh of relief.

"But I was far yet from being out of the wood! I had begun to 'holloa' too soon! When the bear saw that I was about to escape she took to the land, which just here was fairly open and unobstructed; and to my horror she came bounding after me, along the water's edge, at a rate which I could not hope to rival. But in the pause I had recovered my breath and my strength. I shot onward, and my antagonist had a hard gallop before she overhauled me. I could mark now every bound of her great black form. The sharp

chattering laugh of a kingfisher startled me, and I noticed the bird fly off down stream indignant. How I wished I might borrow his wings! Just then the bear, having got a little in advance of me, sprang for mid-stream, so sagaciously timing her effort that had I kept on she must inevitably have seized or upset me. But it was this I was on the watch for. In the nick of time I backed water with all my might, swerved aside, and darted past close behind her—so close that I could have clutched her shaggy hind-quarters. I had no special reason for attempting this feat, however, so I sped on.

“And now began a second stretch of shoals. For the next half-mile it was much the same old story, save that I had gained a better start. There was one little variation, however, which came near making an end of the whole affair. In rounding a sharp turn I did just what I had been dreading,—ran aground. It was only on the skirts of a sloping shoal, and I was off again before I had time to think; but the distance twixt pursuer and pursued had grown painfully less in that moment. I could all but feel the animal’s hot breath upon the back of my neck. The strain was terrible; but soon I began to take heart again. I thought to myself that surely I could hold out till clear of these last shallows; and after that I knew the shores were such as might be expected to baffle even this most indomitable of bears. When again we reached deep water I was paddling a splendid stroke, and the bear, apparently as fresh and as wrathful as ever, was floundering along perhaps two canoe-lengths in the rear.

“By this time the camp was in sight, a good half-mile off. I saw Alec come lazily out of the tent, take a glance at the situation, and dart back again. Gun in hand he re-appeared, and ran up the shore to meet us. Feeling that now I had matters pretty well my own way, I waved him back. So he took his stand on the summit of a precipitous bluff, and awaited his chance for a shot.

“As soon as the bear found herself again compelled to swim, with a snort and a growl she turned shoreward to repeat her former manœuvre. She took the opposite shore to that occupied by Alec. The banks were steep and crumbly, clothed along top with bushes and fallen trees and rocks, 23 and a tangle of wild vines. Yet the unwearied brute managed to overcome these difficulties by her stupendous strength, and actually outstripped me once more. It was all she could accomplish, however; and just as she sprang for the canoe the edge of the bank gave way beneath her weight, and in an avalanche of stones and loose earth she rolled head over heels into the river. I was far away before she could recover herself. I saw she was utterly disgusted with the whole thing. She clambered ashore, and on the top of the bank stood stupidly gazing after me. Then I laughed and laughed till my over-strained sides were near bursting. I could hear peals of mirth from Alec at his post on the bluff, and was calmed at last by a fear lest his convulsions might do him some injury.

“Reaching the landing-place, I only waited to pull the canoe’s nose up onto the grass, then threw myself down quite exhausted. A moment later the bear gave herself a

mighty shaking, and, accepting her defeat, moved sullenly back up stream.”

As Sam concluded, Stranion rose and gravely shook him by the hand.

“I congratulate you on winning your case!” said he. “And now, being first night out, let’s all turn in, or we’ll be fagged to-morrow.”

It is hard to get to sleep the first night in camp, and I was awake for an hour after all the rest 24 were snoring. I lay listening to the soft confusion of night sounds, till at last the liquid gabble of a shallow below the camp faded into an echo of cathedral bells; and while I was yet wondering at the change, I found the morning sun in my face, and saw Stranion holding out a tin of hot coffee. I sprang up, and found myself the laggard of the crowd.

“Come to breakfast,” cried Stranion. “Lynch is here, and it’s time we were over the portage.”

Tom Lynch was a lumberman whom we had engaged by letter to come with his team and drag, and haul our canoes over to Mud Lake. His team was a yoke of half-wild brindle steers. The portage was five miles long, the way an unvarying succession of ruts, mud-holes, and stumps, and Mr. Lynch’s vocabulary, like his temper, was exceedingly vivacious. Yet the journey was accomplished by the middle of the afternoon, and with no bones broken. The flies and mosquitoes were swarming, but we inflicted upon them a crushing defeat by the potent aid of “slitheroo.” This magic fluid consists of Stockholm tar and tallow spiced with pennyroyal, and boiled to about the consistency of treacle. It will almost keep a grizzly at bay.

By half-past three in the afternoon we were launched upon the unenchanted bosom of Mud Lake, a pond perhaps three miles in circumference, weedy, and swarming with leeches. It hardly 25 exceeds two feet in apparent depth, but its bottom is a fathomless slime, stirred up vilely at every dip of the paddle. Its low, marshy shores, fringed here and there with dead bushes and tall, charred trunks, afforded us but one little bit of beauty,—the green and living corner where Beardsley Brook flows out. At this season the brook was very shallow, so that we had often to wade beside the canoes and ease them over the shallows. And now Sam did a heroic thing. He volunteered to let the rest of us do the work, while he waded on ahead to catch some trout for supper.

It was by no means unpleasant wading down this bright and rippling stream, whose banks were lovely with overhanging trees through which the sunlight came deliciously tempered. Time slipped by as sweetly as the stream. But a little surprise was in store for us. We were descending a beautiful alder-fringed reach, when around a bend below us appeared Sam with undignified impetuosity. He struggled toward us knee-deep in the current, dashing up the spray before him, his eyes as wide as saucers. “A bear! A bear!” he gasped; and hurling down his rod and fish in the canoe he seized a heavy revolver. We had grasped our weapons precipitately, and halted. But Sam urged us on, leading the way. As thus full-armed we pressed forward down stream, he told us in a suppressed voice how, as he angled and meditated, and there was no sound save the hushed tumult 26 of a little rapid or the recurrent swish of

his line, suddenly from the bank behind him rose the angry, blatant growl which he knew for the utterance of a she-bear with cubs. At this he had felt indignant and startled; and, with a terrific yell, had hurled a stone into the bushes as a hint that he was a bad man and not to be trifled with. Thereupon had arisen a roar which put his yell to shame. The undergrowth had rocked and crashed with the swift approach of the monster; and, filled with penitential misgivings, he had made haste to flee. When we reached the scene of the possible tragedy, however, the bear, or bears, had disappeared. We grieved not greatly for their absence.

CHAPTER II. THE CAMP ON BEARDSLEY BROOK.

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By this time the stream, having taken in two or three small tributaries, had grown deep enough to float us in comfort. A little before dusk we reached a spot where some previous party had encamped, and had left behind a goodly store of elastic hemlock boughs for bedding. We took the hint and pitched tent.

Sam's trout were a dainty item on our bill of fare that night. Our camp was in a dry but gloomy grove, and we piled the camp-fire high. When the pipes were well going, I remarked,—

“It's time Magnus gave us a story now.”

“Hear! Hear!” cried every one but Magnus.

“One of your own adventures, Magnus,” urged Queerman. “Be content to be your own hero for once.”

“I'll tell you a story my uncle told me,” said Magnus with a quiet smile. “And the O. M. can enter it in his note-book as —

'A TIGER'S PLAYTHING.'

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“My uncle, Colonel Jack Anderson, a retired officer of the English army, was a reticent man. 28 He had never explained to me the cause of a certain long red scar, which, starting from the grizzled locks behind his ear, ran diagonally down his ruddy neck, and was lost beneath his

ever-immaculate shirt-collar. But one night an accidental circumstance led him to tell the story.

“We were sitting coseyly over his study fire, when his cat came stalking in with sanguinary elation, holding a mouse in her mouth. She stood growling beside my chair till I applauded her and patted her for her prowess. Then she withdrew to the middle of the room, and began to play with her half-dazed victim, till Colonel Jack got up and gently put her outside in order to conclude the exhibition.

“On his return my uncle surprised me by remarking that he could not look without a shudder upon a cat tormenting a mouse. As I knew that he had looked quite calmly, on occasion, into the cannon’s mouth, I asked for an explanation.

““Do you see this?’ asked the colonel, touching the scar with his lean, brown finger. I nodded attentively, whereupon he began his story:—

““In India once I went out on a hot, dusty plain near the Ganges, with my rifle and one native servant, to see what I could shoot. It was a dismal place. Here and there were clumps of tall grass and bamboos, with now and then a tamarisk-tree. Parrots screamed in the trees, and the startled caw of some Indian crows made me pause and look around to see what had disturbed them.

““The crows almost at once settled down again into silence; and as I saw no sign of danger, I went on carelessly. I was alone, for I had sent back my servant to find my match-box, which I had left at the place of my last halt; but I had no apprehensions, for I was near the post, and the