

CHARLES ROBERTS

AROUND THE
CAMP-FIRE

Charles Roberts
Around the Camp-fire

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23171499

Around the Camp-fire:

Содержание

CHAPTER I.	4
CHAPTER II.	27
CHAPTER III.	62
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	80

Around the Camp-fire

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

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 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 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, 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.’

"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 down-stairs 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 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 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 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,”

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 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 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.

“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, 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 overstrained 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 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 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 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

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.’

“My uncle, Colonel Jack Anderson, a retired officer of the English army, was a reticent man. 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 coseily 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 district was one from which, as was supposed, the tigers had been cleared out some years before.

“Just as I was musing upon this fact, with a tinge of regret because I had come too late to have a hand in the clearance, I was crushed to the ground by a huge mass which seemed to have been hurled upon me from behind. My head felt as if it had been dashed with icy or scalding water, and then everything turned black.

“If I was stunned by the shock, it was only for an instant. When I opened my eyes I was lying with my face in the sand. Not knowing where I was or what had happened, I started to rise, when instantly a huge paw turned me over on my back, and I saw the great yellow-green eyes of a tiger looking down upon me through their narrow black slits.

“I did not feel horror-stricken; in fact, so far as I can remember, I felt only a dim sense of resignation to the inevitable. I also remember that I noticed with curious interest that the animal looked rather gratified than ferocious.

“I don’t know how long I lay there, stupidly gazing up into the brute’s eyes; but presently I made a movement to sit up, and then I saw that I still held my rifle in my hand. While I was looking at the weapon, with a vague, harassing sense that there was something I ought to do with it, the tiger picked me up by the left shoulder and made off with me into the jungle; and still

I clung to the rifle, though I had forgotten what use I should put it to.

“The grip of the tiger’s teeth upon my shoulder I felt but numbly; and yet, as I found afterwards, it was so far from gentle as to have shattered the bone.

“Having carried me perhaps half a mile, the brute dropped me, and raising her head uttered a peculiar, soft cry. Two cubs appeared at once in answer to the summons, and bounded up to meet her. At the first glimpse of me, however, they sheered off in alarm; and their dam had to coax them for some minutes, rolling me over softly with her paw, or picking me up and laying me down in front of them, before she could convince them that I was harmless.

“At last the youngsters suffered themselves to be persuaded. They threw themselves upon me with eager though not very dangerous ferocity, and began to maul and worry me. Their claws and teeth seemed to awaken me for the first time to a sense of pain. I threw off the snarling little animals roughly, and started to crawl away. In vain the cubs tried to hold me. The mother lay watching the game with satisfaction.

“Instinctively I crept toward a tree, and little by little the desire for escape began to stir in my dazed brain. When I was within a foot or two of the tree the tiger made a great bound, seized me in her jaws, and carried me back to the spot whence I had started.

““Why,” thought I to myself, “this is just exactly the way a cat plays with a mouse!”

“At the same moment a cloud seemed to roll off my brain. No words of mine, my boy, can describe the measureless and sickening horror of that moment, when realization was thus suddenly flashed upon me.

“At the shock my rifle slipped from my relaxing fingers; but I recovered it desperately, with a sensation as if I had been falling over a precipice.

“I knew now what I wanted to do with it. The suddenness of my gesture, however, appeared to warn the tiger that I had yet a little too much life in me. She growled and shook me roughly. I took the hint, you may be sure, and resumed my former attitude of stupidity; but my faculties were now alert enough, and at the cruelest tension.

“Again the cubs began mauling me. I repelled them gently, at the same time looking to my rifle. I saw that there was a cartridge ready to be projected into the chamber. I remembered that the magazine was not more than half empty.

“I started once more to crawl away, with the cubs snarling over me and trying to hold me; and it was at this point I realized that my left shoulder was broken.

“Having crawled four or five feet, I let the cubs turn me about, whereupon I crawled back toward the old tiger, who lay blinking and actually purring. It was plain that she had made a good meal not long before, and was, therefore, in no hurry to despatch me.

“Within about three feet of the beast’s striped foreshoulder I stopped and fell over on my side, as if all but exhausted. My

rifle-barrel rested on a little tussock. The beast moved her head to watch me, but evidently considered me past all possibility of escape, for her eyes rested as much upon her cubs as upon me.

“The creatures were tearing at my legs, but in this supreme moment I never thought of them. I had now thoroughly regained my self-control.

“Laboriously, very deliberately, I got my sight, and covered a spot right behind the old tigress’s foreshoulder, low down. From the position I was in, I knew this would carry the bullet diagonally upward through the heart. I should have preferred to put a bullet in the brain, but in my disabled condition and awkward posture I could not safely try it.

“Just as I was ready, one of the cubs got in the way, and my heart sank. The old tiger gave the cub a playful cuff, which sent it rolling to one side. The next instant I pulled the trigger – and my heart stood still.

“My aim had not wavered a hair’s breadth. The snap of the rifle was mingled with a fierce yell from the tiger; and the long, barred body straightened itself up into the air, and fell over almost on top of me. The cubs sheered off in great consternation.

“I sat up and drew a long breath of thankful relief. The tiger lay beside me, stone dead.

“I was too weak to walk at once, so I leaned against the body of my vanquished foe and rested. My shoulder was by this time setting up an anguish that made me think little of my other injuries. Nevertheless, the scene about me took on a glow of

exquisite color. So great was the reaction that the very sunlight seemed transfigured.

“I know I fairly smiled as I rapped the cubs on the mouth with my rifle-barrel. I felt no inclination to shoot the youngsters, but I would have no more of their over-ardent attentions. The animals soon realized this, and lay down in the sand beyond my reach, evidently waiting for their mother to reduce me to proper submission.

“I must have lain there half an hour, and my elation was rapidly subsiding before the agony in my shoulder, when at last my man, Gunjeet, appeared, tracking the tiger’s traces with stealthy caution.

“He had not waited to go for help, but had followed up the beast without delay, vowing to save me or avenge me ere he slept. His delight was so sincere, and his courage in tracking the tiger alone was so unquestionable, that I doubled his wages on the spot.

“The cubs, on his approach, had run off into covert, so we set out at once for the post. When I got there I was in a raging fever which, with my wounds, kept me laid up for three months.

“On my recovery I found that Gunjeet had gone the next day and captured the two cubs, which he had sent down the river to Benares, while the skin of the old tiger was spread luxuriously on my lounge.

“So you will not wonder,” concluded the colonel, “that the sight of a cat playing with a mouse has become somewhat distasteful to me since that experience, I have acquired so keen a sympathy

for the mouse!”

While Magnus was speaking, a heavy rain had begun. It had little by little beaten down our fire; and now, as the wind was abroad in the hemlocks and the forest world was gloomy, we laced the tent-doors and lit our candles. It was announced by some one that Queerman's turn was come to speak. He grumbled an acquiescence, and then dreamed a while; and in the expectant stillness the rush of rain, the clamor of currents, and the lonely murmur of the tree-tops, crept into our very souls. We thought of the sea; and when Queerman spoke, there was a vibration in his voice as of changing tides and the awe of mighty shores.

“Magnus,” said he, “your tale was most dusty and hot, though not *too* dusty, if I may be allowed to say so. It was of the earth earthy; mine shall be of the water watery. It may be entered in the O. M.'s log as —

“A FIGHT WITH THE HOUNDS OF THE SEA.”

“It was just before daybreak on a dewy June morning of 1887, when a party of four set out to drift for shad. There was the rector (whom you know), my cousin B — (whom you don't know), and myself (whom you think you know). We went to learn how the business of drifting was conducted. There was also the old fisherman, Chris, the owner of the shad-boat. He went for fish.

“By the time the long fathoms of brown net were unwound from the great creaking reel and coiled in the stern of the boat,

the tide had turned, and a current had begun to set outward from the little creek in which our boat was moored. Our rusty mainsail was soon hoisted to catch the gentle catspaws from the shore, and we were underway.

“A word of explanation here. The shad-fishing of the Bay of Fundy is carried on, for the most part, by ‘drifting.’ The boats employed are roomy, heavy, single-masted craft, with a ‘cuddy,’ or forward cabin, in which two men may sleep with comfort. These craft, when loaded, draw several feet of water, and are hard to float off when they chance to run aground. They carry a deep keel, and are stanch sea-boats – as all boats need to be that navigate the rude waters of Fundy.

“When we had gained a few cable-lengths from shore the breeze freshened slightly. It was a mere zephyr, but it drove the boat too fast for us to pay out the net. We furled the sail, and thrust the boat along slowly with our heavy sweeps, while Chris paid out the net over the stern.

“These Fundy boats sometimes stay out several tides, making a haul with each tide; but it was our intention merely to drift out with this ebb, and return by the next flood.

“It was slow work for a while. We ate, told stories, speculated as to how many fish were entangling themselves in our meshes, and at about nine o’clock appealed to Chris to haul in.

“The tremendous tide had drifted us in five hours over twenty miles. We decided to run the boat into the mouth of a small river on our right to take a good swim before we started on the return

trip. The plan was accepted by Chris, and we set ourselves to haul in the net.

“In the centre of the boat stood two huge tubs, into which we threw the silvery shad as we took them from the meshes. When we found a stray skate, squid, or sculpin, we returned it to its native element; but a small salmon we welcomed as a special prize, and laid it away in a wrapping of sail-cloth.

“The catch proved to be rather a light one, though Chris averred it was as good as any he had made that year.

““Why, what has become of the shad?” asked the rector. ‘It seems to me that in former years one could sometimes fill these tubs in a single trip.’

““Ay, ay,” growled Chris, ‘that’s true enough, sir! But the fishin’ ain’t now what it used to be; and it’s all along o’ them blamed dogfish.’

““What do the dogfish have to do with it?” I asked.

““Do with it!” answered Chris. ‘Why, they eat ’em. They eat everything they kin clap ther eye onto. They’re thicker’n bees in these here waters the last year er two back.’

““They are a kind of small shark, I believe?” put in the rector in a tone of inquiry.

““Well, I reckon as how they be. An’ they’re worse nor any other kind as I’ve heern tell of, because they kinder hunt in packs like, an’ nothin’ ain’t a-goin’ to escape them, once they git onto it. I’ve caught ’em nigh onto four foot long, but mostly they run from two to three foot. They’re spry, I tell you, an’ with a mouth

onto 'em like a fox-trap. They're the worst varmin that swims; an' good fer nothin' but to make ile out of ther livers.'

"I've heard them called the "hounds of the sea,"" said B — . 'Are they bold enough to attack a man?'

"They'd attack an elephant, if they could git him in the water. An' they'd eat him too," said Chris.

"I hope they won't put in an appearance while we're taking our swim," remarked, the rector. 'I don't think we had better swim far out.'

"By this time we were near the mouth of the stream, a broad, shallow estuary three or four hundred yards wide. In the middle was a gravelly shoal which was barely uncovered at low water, and was then marked by a line of seaweed and small stones. We bore up the northern channel, and saw that the shores were stony and likely to afford us a firm landing; but the channel was unfamiliar to Chris, and suddenly, with a soft thud, we found ourselves aground in a mud-bank, a hundred yards from shore. The tide had yet a few inches to fall, and we knew that we were fast for an hour or so.

"When we had got ourselves out of our clothes, the surface of the shoal in mid-channel was bare. It was about fifty yards from the boat, and we decided to swim over to it and look for anemones and starfish. B — , who was an indifferent swimmer, took an oar along with him to rest on if he should get tired. We laughed at him for the precaution as the distance was so short; but he retorted, —

“If any of those sea-dogs should turn up, you’ll find that said oar will come in pretty handy.’

“The water was of a delicious temperature; and we swam, floated, and basked in a leisurely fashion. When we had reached the bar the tide was about to turn. The Fundy tides may be said to have practically no slack; they have to travel so fast and so far that they waste no time in idleness. We hailed Chris, whom we had left in the boat, and told him the tide had turned.

“Chris rose from his lounging attitude in the stern, and took a look at the water. The next moment he was on his feet, yelling, ‘All aboard! all aboard! Here’s the dogfish a-comin’!’

“B – and I took the water at once, but the rector stopped us. ‘Back!’ he commanded. ‘They’re upon us already, and our only chance is here in the shoal water till Chris can get the boat over to us.’

“Even as he spoke we noted some small black fins cutting the water between the boat and our shoal. We turned back with alacrity.

“The first thing Chris did was to empty both barrels of my fowling-piece among the advancing fins. At once a great turmoil ensued, caused by the struggles of two or three wounded dogfish. The next moment their struggles were brought to an end. Their companions tore them to pieces in a twinkling.

“The rector shouted to Chris to try to throw us the boat-hook. It was a long throw, but Chris’s sinews rose to the emergency, and the boat-hook landed nearly at our feet. The boat-hook was

followed by a broken gaff, which struck the sand at the farther side of the shoal.

“Meanwhile between us and the boat the water had become alive with dogfish. Our shoal sloped so abruptly that already they could swim up to within two or three feet of us. We knew that the tide would soon bring them upon us, and we turned cold as we thought what our fate would be unless Chris could reach us in time. Then the battle began.

“B – and I, with our awkward weapons, managed to stun a couple of our assailants. The rector’s boat-hook did more deadly execution; it tore the throat out of the first fish it struck. At once the pack scented their comrade’s blood, darted on the wounded fish, devoured it, and crowded after us for more.

“Our blows with the oar and gaff served temporarily to disable our assailants, but not gash their tough skin. But the moment blood was started on one of our enemies his comrades finished the work for us. Almost every stroke of the boat-hook tore a fish, which straightway became food for its fellows. The most I could do with my gaff was to tap a dogfish on the head when I could, and stun him for a while.

“During these exciting minutes the tide was rising with terrible speed. The water that now came washing over our toes was a lather of foam and blood, through which sharp, dark fins and long keen bodies darted and crowded and snapped.

“Suddenly one fish, fiercer than the rest, made a dart at B – ’s leg, and its sharp snout just grazed his skin, causing him to yell

with horror. We tried to get our feet out of the water by standing on the highest stones we could find. Our arms were weary from wielding the oar and the gaff, but the rector's boat-hook kept up its deadly lunges.

"Chris had been firing among our assailants; but now, beholding our strait, he threw down the gun, and strained furiously upon his one oar in the endeavor to shove off the boat. She would not budge.

"Boys, brace up! brace up!" cried the rector. 'She'll float in another minute or two. We can give these chaps all they want.' As he spoke, his boat-hook ripped another fish open. He had caught the knack of so using his weapon that he raked his opponents from underneath without wasting an ounce of effort.

"The fight was getting too hot to last. A big fish, with a most appalling array of fangs, snatched at my foot. Just in time I thrust the broken end of the gaff through his throat and turned him on his back. His neighbors took charge of him, and he vanished in bloody fragments.

"As I watched this an idea struck me.

"Chris!" I yelled, 'the shad! the shad! Throw them overboard, a dozen at a time!'

"Splendid!" cried the rector; and B – panted approvingly, 'That's the talk! That'll call 'em off.'

"Down came his oar with fresh vigor upon the head of a dogfish, which turned at once on its side. Then the shad began to go overboard.

“At first the throwing of the shad produced no visible effect, and the attack on us continued in unabated fury. Then the water began to foam and twist where the shad were dropping, and on a sudden we were left alone.

“The whole pack forsook us to attack the shad. How they fought and lashed and sprang and tore in one mad turmoil of foam and fish!

“‘Spread them a bit!’ B – cried. ‘Give them all a chance, or they’ll come back at us.’

“‘She’s afloat! she’s afloat!’ he yelled the next moment, in frantic delight.

“Chris threw out another dozen of fish. Then he thrust his oar over the stern, and the big boat moved slowly toward us. At intervals Chris stopped and threw out more shad. As we eagerly watched his approach the thought occurred to us that when the boat should reach us it would be with the whole pack surrounding it. The ravenous creatures seemed almost ready to leap aboard.

“‘We can use these oars and things as leaping-poles,’ suggested B – .

“‘That’s what we’ll have to do,’ agreed the rector. Then he cried to Chris, ‘Bring her side onto the shoal, so we can all jump aboard at the same time.’

“As the boat drew nearer, Chris paused again, and threw a score of shad far astern. Away darted the dogfish; and the boat rounded up close before us.

“The agility with which we sprang aboard was remarkable,

and Chris almost hugged us in his joy.

“Not another shad’ll they git out er me!” he declared triumphantly.

“Well, I should rather think not,” remarked the rector. ‘But they might as well have some more dogfish.’

“With these words he put his foot upon the gunwale, and his unwearied boat-hook went back jubilantly into the battle.

“Rapidly loading and firing my shotgun, I picked off as many of our enemies as I comfortably could; and B – , by lashing the boat’s hatchet on the end of the gaff, made a weapon with which he played havoc among our foes.

“But the fray lasted not much longer. Innumerable as were yet the survivors, their hunger was becoming appeased, and their ferocity diminished. In a little while they sheered off to a safer distance.

“When we had time to think of our own condition, we found that our backs were painfully scorched by the blazing June sun. As with pain we struggled into our clothes, Chris trimmed our course toward home.

“I reckon you know now ’bout all you’ll wanter know ’bout the ways o’ dogfish,’ he suggested.

“They are certainly very bloodthirsty,’ said the rector; ‘but at the same time they are interesting. That they gave us a noble contest you can’t deny.’”

When Queerman relapsed into silence, Ranolf took up the parable without waiting to be called upon.

“Queerman’s story,” said he, “reminds me of an adventure of my own, which befell me in that same tide-region which he has just been talking of. You know, I spent much of my illustrious boyhood about the Tantramar marshes, and overlooking the yellow head-waters of the Bay of Fundy. The name of my story is, ‘The Bull and the Leaping-Pole,’ and the scene of it is within a mile of the spot whence Queerman and his crowd set out for shad. It will serve to show what agility I am capable of on a suitable occasion.

THE BULL AND THE LEAPING-POLE

“Out on the Tantramar marshes the wind, as usual, was racing with superfluous energy, bowing all one way the purple timothy-tops, and rolling up long green waves of grass that shimmered like the sea under the steady afternoon sun. I revelled in the fresh and breezy loneliness, which nevertheless at times gave me a sort of thrill, as the bobolinks, stopping their song for a moment, left no sound in my ears save the confused ‘swish’ of the wind. Men talk at times of the loneliness of the dark, but to my mind there is no more utter solitude than may be found in a broad white glare of sunshine.

“Here on the marsh, two miles from the skirt of the uplands, perhaps half a mile from the nearest incurve of the dike, on a twisted, sweet-smelling bed of purple vetch, I lay pretending to read, and deliciously dreaming. My bed of vetch sloped gently

toward the sun, being on the bank of a little winding creek which idled through the long grasses on its way to the Tantramar. Once a tidal stream, the creek had been brought into subjection by what the country people call a 'bito,' built across its mouth to shut out the tides; and now it was little more than a rivulet at the bottom of the deep gash which it had cut for itself through the flats in its days of freedom. From my resting-place I could see in the distance a marsh-hawk noiselessly skimming the tops of the grass, peering for field-mice; or a white gull wandering aimlessly in from the sea. Beyond the dike rose the gaunt skeletons of three or four empty net-reels; and a little way off towards the uplands stood an old barn used for storing hay.

"Beside me among the vetch-blossoms, hummed about by the great bumblebees and flickered over by white and yellow butterflies, lay my faithful leaping-pole, – a straight young spruce trimmed and peeled, light and white and tough. Some years before, fired by reading in *Hereward* of the feats of 'Wulfric the Heron,' I had bent myself to learn to leap with the pole, and had become no less skilful in the exercise than eagerly devoted thereto. It gave me, indeed, a most fascinating sense of freedom. Ditches, dikes, and fences were of small concern to me, and I went craning it over the country like a huge meadow-hen.

"On this particular afternoon, which I am not likely soon to forget, when the bobolinks had hushed for so long that the whispering stillness grew oppressive, I became ashamed of the weird apprehension which kept stealing across me; and springing

to my feet with a shout, I seized my leaping-pole, and went sailing over the creek hilariously. It was a good leap, and I contemplated the distance with satisfaction, marred only by the fact that I had no spectators.

“Then I shouted again, from full lungs; and turning instinctively for applause toward the far-off uplands, I became aware that I was not so much alone as I had fancied.

“From behind the old barn, at the sound of my voice, appeared a head and shoulders which I recognized, and at the sight of which my satisfaction vanished. They belonged to Atkinson’s bull, a notoriously dangerous brute, which only the week before had gored a man fatally, and which had thereupon been shut up and condemned to the knife. As was evident, he had broken out of his pen, and wandering hither to the marshes, had been luxuriating in such plenty of clover as well might have rendered him mild-mannered. I thought of this for a moment; but the faint hope – it was very faint – was at once and emphatically dispelled.

“Slowly, and with an ugly bellow, he walked his whole black-and-white length into view, took a survey of the situation, and then, after a moment’s pawing, and some insulting challenges which I did not feel in a position to accept, he launched himself toward me with a sort of horrid grunt.

“After the first chill I had quite recovered my nerve, and realized at once that my chances lay altogether in my pole.

“The creek was in many places too wide for me to jump it in a clear leap from brink to brink of the gully, but at other points

it was well within my powers. To the bull, however, I perceived that it would be at all points a serious obstacle, only to be passed by clambering first down and then up the steep sides.

“Without waiting for close parley with my assailant, I took a short run, and placed myself once more amongst the vetch-blossoms whence I had started. I had but time to cast my eye along, and notice that about a stone’s throw farther down, toward the dike, the creek narrowed somewhat so as to afford me an easier leap, when the hot brute reached the edge opposite, and, unable to check himself, plunged headlong into the gully.

“As he rolled and snorted in the water I could scarcely help laughing; but my triumph was not for long. The overthrow seemed to sting him into tenfold fury. With a nimbleness that appalled me he charged straight up the bank, and barely had I taken to my heels ere he had reached the top and was after me. So close was he that I failed to make the point aimed at. I was forced to leap desperately, and under such disadvantage that only by a hair’s-breadth did I gain the opposite side. Somewhat shaken by the effort, I ran on straightway to where I could command a less trying jump.

“The bull made no halt whatever, but plunged right into the gully, rolled over, and all covered with mud and streaming weeds was up the slope again like a cat.

“But this performance delayed him, and gave me a second or two, so that I was enabled to make my leap with more deliberation and less effort. As I did so, I noticed with gratitude

that the banks of the creek had here become much steeper. The bull noticed it too, and paused, bellowing vindictively; while as for me, I leaned on my trusty pole to regain my breath. With more circumspection this time the brute attempted the crossing, but losing his foothold he came to the bottom, as before, all in a heap.

“As he gathered himself up again for the ascent I held my ground, resolved to move but a yard or two aside when compelled, and not lightly to quit a position so much to my advantage. But here my foaming adversary found the slope too steep for him, and after every charge he fell back ignominiously into the water. It did not take him long, however, to realize the situation, and dashing up stream to his former crossing-place he was at the top in a twinkling, and once more bearing down upon me like a whirlwind of furies. The respite had given me time to recover my breath, and now with perfect coolness I transferred myself once more to the other side. Upon this my pursuer wheeled round, retraced his steps without a pause, crossed over, and in a moment I found my position again rendered untenable.

“Of course, there was nothing else for it but to make another jump; and in the result there was no perceptible variation. The inexorable brute left me no leisure to sit down and plan a diversion. I was conscious of a burning anxiety to get home, and I tried to calculate how much of this sort of thing it would take to discourage my tireless foe. Not arriving at any satisfactory conclusion, I continued to make a shuttle-cock of myself for

some minutes longer.

“Immediately below me I saw that the sides of the gully retained their steepness, but so widened apart as to make the leap a doubtful one. At a considerable distance beyond, however, they drew together again, and at last I convinced myself that a change of base would be justified. By such a change, supposing it safely accomplished, it was evident that I would gain much longer breathing-spells, while my antagonist would be forced to such detours as would surely soon dishearten him.

“At the next chance, therefore, I broke at the top of my speed for the new position. I had but a scant moment to spare, for the bull was closing upon me with his terrific gallop. I made my jump, nevertheless, with deliberation. But, alas for the ‘best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men’! I had planted my pole in a spot of sticky clay, and after a slow sprawl through the air I landed helplessly on hands and knees about half-way up the opposite bank.

“Seeing my mishap, the bull forgot his late-learned caution, and, charging headlong, brought up not a couple of yards below me. Without waiting to pull my pole out of the mud I scrambled desperately to the top. It was a sick moment for me as the brute recovered his footing, and made up the steep so impetuously that he almost conquered it; but I threw myself flat on my face and reached for the pole, knowing well that without it the game was pretty well up for me. As I succeeded in wrenching it from the clay, my pursuer’s rush brought him so close that I could almost

touch his snorting and miry nostrils. But this was his best effort, and he could come no nearer. Realizing this, he did just what I expected him to do, – gave his tail an extra twist of relentless malice, and swept off up the bed of the creek to his former place of transit. I now breathed more freely; and having prodded the bottom till I found a firm foundation for my pole, I began to feel secure.

“When the bull had gained my side of the creek, and had come so far as to insure his coming all the way, I sprang across; and a moment later saw him tearing up the soil on the very spot my feet had just forsaken. This time he shirked the plunge, and stood on the bank bellowing his challenge. I patted my good spruce pole. Then I threw some sods across at him, which resulted in a fresh tempest, a new rush to the old crossing, and another ‘over’ for my leaping-pole and me.

“Meanwhile I had concocted a plan for check-mating my antagonist. I saw that from this point forward to the dike the gully became more and more impassable, and I thought if I could lure the bull into following me but for a little way down the opposite bank, I could gain such a start upon him that to reach the dike would be an easy matter. With this design then, when the bull again repeated his angry challenge, I shouted, threw another sod, and started on a trot down the creek. But the cunning brute was not to be deceived in such fashion. He turned at once to repeat his former tactics, and I was fain to retrace my steps precipitately.

“The brute now resolved, apparently, upon a waiting game.

After pawing his defiance afresh, he proceeded to walk around and eat a little, ever and anon raising his head to eye me with a sullen and obstinate hatred. For my own part, now that time had ceased to be an object, I sat down and racked my brains over the problem. Would the brute keep up this guard all through the night? I felt as if there was a sleuth-hound on my trail. That now silent presence across the creek began to weigh upon me like a nightmare. At last, in desperation, I resolved upon a straight-away race for the dike. As I pondered on the chances, they seemed to grow more and more favorable. I was a good runner, and though handicapped with the pole, would have a fair start on my enemy. Having made up my mind to the venture I rose to my feet, ready to seize the smallest advantage.

“As I rose, the bull wheeled sharply, and sprang to the edge of the bank with a muffled roar. But seeing that I stood leaning idly on my pole and made no motion to depart, he soon tossed away in the sulks and resumed his grazing. In a few moments a succulent streak of clover so engrossed him that he turned his back fairly upon me – and like a flash I was off, speeding noiselessly over the grass.

“Not till several seconds had been gained did I hear the angry bellow which told of the detection of my stratagem. I did not stop to look back, and I certainly made some very pretty running; but the dike seemed still most dismally remote when I heard that heavy gallop plunging behind me. Nearer, nearer it drew, with terrible swiftness; and nearer and nearer drew the dike. I reached

it where it was perhaps about seven feet high. Slackening up to plant my pole squarely, I sprang, and had barely time to steady myself on the summit when the beast brought up with a roar at my very feet. It was a narrow, a very narrow escape.

“With a sigh of relief and gratitude I sat me down to rest, and took some satisfaction in poking the ribs of the baffled brute below. Then, lightly balancing my pole in one hand, I turned my face toward the ‘bito,’ and made my way thoughtfully homeward. It was altogether too literally a ‘hair’s-breadth’ adventure.”

When Ranolf concluded there was a general stir. Pipes were refilled, and a “snack” (of biscuits, cheese, and liquids to taste) was passed around. Then Stranion said, —

“It’s your turn, O. M.”

“But it’s bedtime,” pleaded I; “and besides, as I have the writing to do, let others do the speaking!”

My arguments were received with a stony stare, so I made haste to begin.

“Like Magnus,” said I, “modesty forbids me to be my own hero. I’ll tell you a story which I picked up last fall, when I was alleged to be pigeon-shooting twenty miles above Fredericton. We will call the yarn —

‘SAVED BY THE CATTLE.’

“I was talking to an old farmer whom I had chanced to come across, and who had passed me a cheery good-day. After I had

spoken of the crops, and he had praised my new gun, I broached a subject of much interest to myself.

“How do you account for the fact, if it is a fact,” said I, slipping a cartridge into my right barrel, “that the caribou are getting yearly more numerous in the interior of New Brunswick, while other game seems to be disappearing. As for the wild pigeons, you may say they are all gone. Here I have been on the go since before sunrise, and that bird is the only sign of a pigeon I have so much as got a glimpse of.”

“Well,” replied my companion, as for the pigeons, I can’t say how it is. In old times I’ve seen them so plenty round here you could knock them down with a stick; that is, if you were anyways handy with a stick. But they do say that caribou are increasing because the wolves have disappeared. You see, the wolves used to be the worst enemy of the caribou, because they could run them down nice and handy in winter, when the snow was deep and the crust so thin that the caribou were bound to break through it at every step. However, I don’t believe there has been a wolf seen in this part of the country for fifty years, and it’s only within the last ten years or so that the caribou have got more plenty.”

“We had seated ourselves, the old farmer and I, on a ragged snake-fence that bounded a buckwheat-field overlooking the river. The field was a new clearing, and the ripened buckwheat reared its brown heads among a host of blackened and distorted stumps. It was a crisp and delicious autumn morning, and the solitary pigeon that had rewarded my long tramp over the uplands

was one that I had surprised at its breakfast in the buckwheat. Now, finding that my new acquaintance was likely to prove interesting, I dropped my gun gently into the fence corner, loosened my belt a couple of holes, and asked the farmer if he had himself ever seen any wolves in New Brunswick.

“‘Not to say many,’ was the old man’s reply; ‘but they say that troubles never come single, and so, what wolves I *have* seen, I saw them all in a heap, so to speak.’

“As he spoke, the old man fixed his eyes on a hilltop across the river, with a far-off look that seemed to promise a story. I settled into an attitude of encouraging attention, and waited for him to go on. His hand stole deep into the pocket of his gray homespun trousers, and brought to view a fig of ‘black-jack,’ from which he gnawed a thoughtful bite.

“Instinctively he passed the tobacco to me; and on my declining it, which I did with grave politeness, he began the following story: —

“When I was a little shaver about thirteen years old, I was living on a farm across the river, some ten miles up. It was a new farm, which father was cutting out of the woods; but it had a good big bit of ‘interval,’ so we were able to keep a lot of stock.

“One afternoon late in the fall, father sent me down to the interval, which was a good two miles from the house, to bring the cattle home. They were pasturing on the aftermath; but the weather was getting bad, and the grass was about done, and father thought the ‘critters,’ as we called them, would be much better

in the barn. My little ten-year-old brother went with me, to help me drive them. That was the time I found out there were wolves in New Brunswick.

“The feed being scarce, the cattle were scattered badly; and it was supper-time before we got them together, at the lower end of the interval, maybe three miles and a half from home. We didn’t mind the lateness of the hour, however, though we were getting pretty hungry, for we knew the moon would be up right after sundown. The cattle after a bit appeared to catch on to the fact that they were going home to snug quarters and good feed, and then they drove easy and hung together. When we had gone about half-way up the interval, keeping along by the river, the moon got up and looked at us over the hills, very sharp and thin. ‘Ugh!’ says Teddy to me in half a whisper, ‘don’t she make the shadows black?’ He hadn’t got the words more than out of his mouth when we heard a long, queer, howling sound from away over the other side of the interval; and the little fellow grabbed me by the arm, with his eyes fairly popping out of his head. I can see his startled face now; but he was a plucky lad for his size as ever walked.

“‘What’s that?’ he whispered.

“‘Sounds mighty like the wind,’ said I, though I knew it wasn’t the wind, for there wasn’t a breath about to stir a feather.

“The sound came from a wooded valley winding down between the hills. It *was* something like the wind, high and thin, but by and by getting loud and fierce and awful, as if a lot more

voices were joining in; and I just tell you my heart stopped beating for a minute. The cattle heard it, you'd better believe, and bunched together, kind of shivering. Then two or three young heifers started to bolt; but the old ones knew better, and hooked them back into the crowd. Then it flashed over me all at once. You see, I was quite a reader, having plenty of time in the long winters. Says I to Teddy, with a kind of sob in my throat, 'I guess it must be wolves.' – 'I guess so,' says Teddy, getting brave after his first start. And then, not a quarter of a mile away, we saw a little pack of gray brutes dart out of the woods into the moonlight. I grabbed Teddy by the hand, and edged in among the cattle.

"Let's get up a tree!" said Teddy.

"Of course we will," said I, with a new hope rising in my heart. We looked about for a suitable tree in which we might take refuge, but our hopes sank when we saw there was not a decent-sized tree in reach. Father had cleared off everything along the river-bank except some Indian willow scrub not six feet high.

"If the cattle, now, had scattered for home, I guess it would have been all up with Teddy and me, and father and mother would have been mighty lonesome on the farm. But what do you suppose the 'critters' did? When they saw those gray things just lengthening themselves out across the meadow, the old cows and the steers made a regular circle, putting the calves – with me and Teddy – in the centre. They backed in onto us pretty tight, and stood with their heads out and horns down, for all the world like a

company of militia forming square to receive a charge of cavalry. And right good bayonets they made, those long, fine horns of our cattle.

“To keep from being trodden on, Teddy and I got onto the backs of a couple of yearlings, who didn’t like it any too well, but were packed in so tight they couldn’t help themselves. As the wolves came streaking along through the moonlight, they set up again that awful, shrill, wind-like, swelling howl, and I thought of all the stories I had read of the wolves of Russia and Norway, and such countries; and the thought didn’t comfort me much. I didn’t know what I learned afterward, that the common wolf of North America is much better fed than his cousin in the Old World, and consequently far less bloodthirsty. I seemed to see fire flashing from the eyes of the pack that were rushing upon us; and I thought their white fangs, glistening in the moonlight, were dripping with the blood of human victims.

“‘I expect father’ll hear that noise,’ whispered Ted, ‘and he and Bill’ (that was the hired man) ‘will come with their guns and save us.’

“‘Yes,’ said I scornfully; ‘I suppose you’d like them to come along now, and get eaten up by the wolves!’

“I was mighty sorry afterward for speaking that way, for it near broke Teddy’s heart. However, sobbing a bit, the little fellow urged in self-defence, ‘Why, there’s only five wolves anyway, and father and Bill could easily kill them!’

“It was true. There were just five of the brutes, though my

excited eyes had been seeing about fifty – just such a pack as I had been used to reading about. However, these five seemed mighty hungry, and now they were right onto us.

“I guess they weren’t used to cattle like ours. Father’s old black-and-white bull was running the affair that night, and he stood facing the attack. The wolves never halted; but with their red tongues hanging out, and their narrow jaws snapping like fox-traps, they gave a queer, nasty gasp that it makes my blood run cold to think of, and sprang right onto the circle of horns.

“We heard the old bull mumble something away down in his throat, and he sort of heaved up his hind-quarters and pitched forward, without leaving the ranks. The next thing we saw, one of his long horns was through the belly of the leader wolf, and the animal was tossed up into the air, yelping like a kicked dog. He came down with a thud, and lay snapping at the grass and kicking; while the other four, who had been repulsed more or less roughly, drew back and eyed their fallen comrade with an air of disapproval. I expected to see them jump upon him and eat him at once, but they didn’t; and I began to distrust the stories I had read about wolves. It appeared, however, that it was not from any sense of decency that they held back, but only that they wanted beef rather than wolf meat, as we found a little later.

“Presently one of the four slouched forward, and sniffed at his dying comrade. The brute was still lively, however, and snapped his teeth viciously at the other’s legs, who thereupon slouched back to the pack. After a moment of hesitation, the four stole

silently, in single file, round and round the circle, turning their heads so as to glare at us all the time, and looking for a weak spot to attack. They must have gone round us half a dozen times, and then they sat down on their tails, and stuck their noses into the air, and howled and howled for maybe five minutes steady. Teddy and I, who were now feeling sure our 'critters' could lick any number of wolves, came to the conclusion the brutes thought they had too big a job on their hands and were signalling for more forces. 'Let 'em come,' exclaimed Teddy. But we were getting altogether too confident, as we soon found out.

"After howling for a while, the wolves stopped and listened. Then they howled again, and again they stopped and listened; but still no answer came. At this they got up and once more began prowling round the circle, and everywhere they went you could see the long horns of the cattle pointing in their direction. I can tell you cattle know a thing or two more than they get credit for.

"Well, when the wolves came round to their comrade's body, they saw it was no longer kicking, and one of them took a bite out of it as if by way of an experiment. He didn't seem to care for wolf, and turned away discontentedly. The idea struck Teddy as so funny that he laughed aloud. The laugh sounded out of place, and fairly frightened me. The cattle stirred uneasily; and as for Teddy, he wished he had held his tongue, for the wolf turned and fixed his eye upon him, and drew nearer and nearer, till I thought he was going to spring over the cattle's heads and seize us. But in a minute I heard the old bull mumbling again in his throat; and

the wolf sprang back just in time to keep from being gored. How I felt like hugging that bull!

"I cheered Teddy up, and told him not to laugh or make a noise again. As the little fellow lifted his eyes he looked over my shoulder, and, instantly forgetting what I had been saying, shouted, 'Here come father and Bill!' I looked in the same direction and saw them, sure enough, riding furiously towards us. But the wolves didn't notice them, and resumed their prowling.

"On the other side of the circle from our champion, the black-and-white bull, there stood a nervous young cow; and just at this time the wolf who had got his eye on Teddy seemed to detect this weak spot in the defence. Suddenly he dashed like lightning on the timid cow, who shrank aside wildly, and opened a passage by which the wolf darted into the very centre of the circle. The brute made straight for Teddy, whom I snatched from his perch and dragged over against the flank of the old bull. Instantly the herd was in confusion. The young cow had bounded into the open and was rushing wildly up the interval, and three of the wolves were at her flanks in a moment. The wolf who had marked Teddy for his prey leaped lightly over a calf or two, and was almost upon us, when a red 'moolley' cow, the mother of one of these calves, butted him so fiercely as to throw him several feet to one side. Before he could reach us a second time the old bull had spotted him. Wheeling in his tracks, as nimble as a squirrel, he knocked me and Teddy over like a couple of ninepins, and was onto the wolf in a flash. How he did mumble and grumble way down in

his stomach; but he fixed the wolf. He pinned the brute down and smashed him with his forehead, and then amused himself tossing the body in the air; and just at this moment father and Bill rode up and snatched us two youngsters onto their saddles.

“Are you hurt?” questioned father breathlessly. But he saw in a moment we were not, for we were flushed with pride at the triumph of our old bull.

“And be they any more wolves, so’s I kin git a shot at ’em?” queried Bill.

“Old Spot has fixed two of ’em,” said I.

“And there’s the other two eating poor Whitey over there,” exclaimed Teddy, pointing at a snarling knot of creatures two or three hundred yards across the interval.

“Sure enough, they had dragged down poor Whitey and were making a fine meal off her carcass. But Bill rode over and spoiled their fun. He shot two of them, while the other left like a gray streak. And that’s the last *I’ve* seen of wolves in this part of the country!”

“That was a close shave,” said I; ‘and the cattle showed great grit. I’ve heard of them adopting tactics like that.’

“Well,” said the old farmer, getting down from the fence rail and picking up his tin can. ‘I must be moving. Good-day to you.’ Before he had taken half a dozen steps he turned round and remarked, ‘I suppose, now, if those had been Norway wolves or Roossian wolves, the “critters” would have had no show?’

“Very little, I imagine,” was my answer.”

Whether it was that my story had gone far toward putting every one to sleep, I know not. The fact remains, to be interpreted as one will, that no longer was there any objection raised when I proposed that we should turn in. That night, I think, no one of us lay awake over long. Before I dropped asleep I heard two owls hooting hollowly to each other through the wet woods. The sound changed gradually to a clamor of wolves over their slain victim, and then to the drums and trumpets of an army on the march; and then I awoke to find it broad daylight, and Stranion beating a tin pan just over my head.

CHAPTER III.

AT CAMP DE SQUATOOK

The next morning we got off at a good hour. For the last half mile of its course we found Beardsley Brook so overgrown with alders that we had to chop and haul our way through it with infinite labor. Here we wasted some time fishing for Sam's pipe, which had fallen overboard among the alders. The pipe was black, with crooked stem, plethoric in build, and so heavy that we all thought it would sink where it fell. As soon as the catastrophe occurred we halted till the water, here about two feet deep, had become clear. Then, peering down among the alder-stems, Ranolf spied the pipe on the sandy bottom, looking blurred and distorted through the writhing current. Long we grappled for it, poking at it with pole and paddle. We would cautiously raise it a little way towards the surface; but even as we began to triumph it would wriggle off again as if actually alive, and settle languidly back upon the sand. We all knew, without Ranolf's elaborate explanations, that its lifelike movement was due to its being so little heavier than the water it displaced, or to the uneven refraction of the light through the moving fluid, or to some other equally satisfactory and scientific cause. Finally Sam, getting impatient, plunged in arm and shoulder, and grasped the pipe victoriously. He came up empty-handed; and we beheld a

huge tadpole, now thoroughly aroused, flaunting off down stream in high dudgeon. Ranolf remarked that the laws of refraction were to him obscure; and we continued our journey. The real pipe we overtook farther down stream, floating along jauntily as a cork.

Once out upon the Squatook River our course was rapid, for the current was swift and the channel clear. There were some wild rapids, but we ran them victoriously. By noon we were on the bosom of Big Squatook Lake. By six o'clock we had traversed this beautiful and solitary water, and were pitching our tent near the outlet, on a soft brown carpet of pine-needles. Here was a circular opening amid the huge trunks. Between the lake and our encampment hung a screen of alder and wild-cherry, whence a white beach of pebbles slanted broadly to the waves. While Stranion and Queerman made preparations for supper, the rest of us whipped the ripples of the outlet for trout. The shores of the lake at this spot draw together in two grand curves, and at the apex flows out the Squatook River, about waist-deep and a stone's throw broad. It murmurs pleasantly on for the first few rods, and then begins to dart and chafe, and lift an angry voice. Hither the Indians come to spear whitefish in their season. To assist their spearing they had the outlet fenced part way across with a double row of stakes. All but the smallest fish were thus compelled to descend through a narrow passage, wherein they were at the mercy of the spearman. This fence we now found very convenient. Letting the canoe drift against it, we perched

on top of the stakes, a couple of feet above water, and cast our flies unimpeded in every direction. The trout were abundant, and took the flies freely. For an hour we had most exciting sport. It was in itself, for all true fishermen, worth the whole journey. The Squatook trout are of a good average size, and very game. Of the twenty odd fish we killed that evening, there were two that passed the one and one-half pound scratch upon our scales, and several that cleared the pound.

Deciding to spend some days in this fair spot, we named it Camp de Squatook. Lopping the lower branches of the trees, we made ourselves pegs on which to hang our tins and other utensils; while a dry cedar log, split skilfully by Stranion, furnished us with slabs for a table. Our commissariat was well supplied with campers' necessities and luxuries, but it was upon trout above all that we feasted. Sometimes we boiled them; sometimes we broiled them; more often we fried them in the fragrant, yellow corn-meal. The delicate richness of the hot, pink, luscious flakes is only to be realized by those who feast on the spoils of their own rods, with the relish of free air and vigor and out-door appetites.

Campers prate much of early hours, and of seeking their blankets with sunset; but we held to no such doctrine. Night in these wilds is rich with a mysterious beauty, an immensity of solitude such as day cannot dream of. Supper over, we stretched ourselves out between tent-door and camp-fire, pillowing our heads on the folded bedding. Across the yellow, fire-lit circle, through the trunks and hanging branches, we watched the still,

gleaming level of the lake, whence at intervals would ring out startlingly clear the goblin laughter of the loon.

We were not so tired as on the previous evening, and it took us longer to settle down into the mood for story-telling. At last Stranion was called upon. He was ready, and speech flowed from him at once, as if his mouth had been just uncorked.

A NIGHT ENCOUNTER

“I’ll tell you a tale,” said he, “of this very spot, on this very Big Squatook; and, of course, with me and the panther both in it.

“Once upon a time – that is to say in the summer of 1886 – I fished over these waters with Tom Allison. You remember he was visiting Fredericton nearly all that year. We camped right here two days, and then went on to the Little Lake, or Second Squatook, just below.

“One moonlight night, when the windless little lake before our camp was like a shield of silver, and the woody mountains enclosing us seemed to hold their breath for delight, I was seized with an overwhelming impulse to launch the canoe and pole myself up here to Big Squatook. The distance between the two lakes is about a mile and a half, with rapid water almost all the way; and Allison, who had been amusing himself laboriously all day, was too much in love with his pipe and blankets by the camp-fire to think of accompanying me. All my persuasions were wasted upon him, so I went alone.

“Of course I had an excuse. I wanted to set night-lines for the gray trout, or *togue*, which haunt the waters of Big Squatook. A favorite feeding-ground of theirs is just where the water begins to shoal toward the outlet yonder. Strange as it may seem, the *togue* are never taken in Second Lake, or in any other of the Squatook chain.

“It was a weird journey up-stream, I can tell you. The narrow river, full of rapids, but so free from rocks in this part of its course that its voice seldom rises above a loud, purring whisper, was overhung by many ancient trees. Through the spaces between their tops fell the moonlight in sharp white patches. As the long slow thrusts of my pole forced the canoe stealthily upward against the current, the creeping panorama of the banks seemed full of elvish and noiseless life. White trunks slipped into shadow, and black stumps caught gleams of sudden radiance, till the strangeness of it all began to impress me more than its beauty, and I felt a curious and growing sense of danger. I even cast a longing thought backward toward the camp-fire’s cheer and my lazier comrade; and when at length, slipping out upon the open bosom of the lake, I put aside my pole and grasped my paddle, I drew a breath of distinct relief.

“It took but a few minutes to place my three night-lines. This done, I paddled with slow strokes toward that big rock far out yonder.

“The broad surface was as unrippled as a mirror, like it is now, save where my paddle and the gliding prow disturbed it. When I

floated motionless, and the canoe drifted softly beyond the petty turmoil of my paddle, it seemed as if I were hanging suspended in the centre of a blue and starry sphere. The magic of the water so persuaded me, that presently I hauled up my canoe on the rock, took off my clothes, and swam far out into the liquid stillness. The water was cold, but of a life-giving freshness; and when I had dressed and resumed my paddle I felt full of spirit for the wild dash home to camp, through the purring rapids and the spectral woods. Little did I dream just how wild that dash was to be!

“You know the whitefish barrier where you fellows were fishing this evening. Well, at the time of my visit the barrier extended only to mid-channel, one-half having been carried away, probably by logs, in the spring freshets. For this accident, doubtless very annoying to the Indians, I soon had every reason to be grateful.

“As I paddled noiselessly into the funnel, and began to feel the current gathering speed beneath me, and noted again the confused, mysterious glimmer and gloom of the forest into which I was drifting, I once more felt that unwonted sense of danger stealing over me. With a word of vexation I shook it off, and began to paddle fiercely. At the same instant my eyes, grown keen and alert, detected something strange about the bit of Indian fence which I was presently to pass. It was surely very high and massive in its outer section! I stayed my paddle, yet kept slipping quickly nearer. Then suddenly I arrested my progress with a few mighty backward strokes. Lying crouched flat along the tops of

the stakes, its head low down, its eyes fixed upon me, was a huge panther.

“I was completely at a loss, and for a minute or two remained just where I was, backing water to resist the current, and trying to decide what was best to be done. As long as I kept to the open water, of course I was quite safe; but I didn’t relish the idea of spending the night on the lake. I knew enough of the habits and characteristics of the panther to be aware the brute would keep his eye on me as long as I remained alone. But what I *didn’t* know was how far a panther could jump! Could I safely paddle past that fence by hugging the farther shore? I felt little inclined to test the question practically; so I turned about and paddled out upon the lake.

“Then I drifted and shouted songs and stirred up the echoes for a good round hour. I hoped, rather faintly, that the panther would follow me up the shore. This, in truth, he may have done; but when I paddled back to the outlet, there he was awaiting me in exactly the same position as when I first discovered him.

“By this time I had persuaded myself that there was ample room for me to pass the barrier without coming in range of the animal’s spring. I knew that close to the farther shore the water was deep. When I was about thirty yards from the stakes, I put on speed, heading for just about the middle of the opening. My purpose was to let the panther fancy that I was coming within his range, and then to change my course at the last moment so suddenly that he would not have time to alter his plan of

attack. It is quite possible that this carefully planned scheme was unnecessary, and that I rated the brute's intelligence and forethought quite too high. But however that may be, I thought it safer not to take any risks with so cunning an adversary.

"The panther lay in the sharp black shadow, so that it was impossible for me to note his movements accurately; but just as an instinct warned me that he was about to spring, I swerved smartly toward him, and hurled the light canoe forward with the mightiest stroke I was capable of. The manoeuvre was well executed, for just before I came fairly opposite the grim figure on the stake-tops, the panther sprang.

"Instinctively I threw myself forward, level with the cross-bars; and in the same breath there came a snarl and a splash close beside me. The brute had miscalculated my speed, and got himself a ducking. I chuckled a little as I straightened up; but the sigh of relief which I drew at the same time was profound in its sincerity. I had lamentably underestimated the reach of the panther's spring. He had alighted close to the water's edge, just where I imagined the canoe would be out of reach. I looked around again. He was climbing alertly out of the hated bath. Giving himself one mighty shake, he started after me down along the bank, uttering a series of harsh and piercing screams. With a sweep of the paddle I darted across current, and placed almost the full breadth of the river between my enemy and myself.

"I have paddled many a canoe-race, but never one that my heart was so set upon winning as this strange one in which

I now found myself straining every nerve. The current of the Squatook varies greatly in speed, though nowhere is it otherwise than brisk. At first I gained rapidly on my pursuer; but presently we reached a spot where the banks were comparatively level and open; and here the panther caught up and kept abreast of me with ease. With a sudden sinking at the heart I called to mind a narrow gorge a quarter of a mile ahead, from the sides of which several drooping trunks hung over the water. From one of these, I thought the panther might easily reach me, running out and dropping into the canoe as I darted beneath. The idea was a blood-curdling one, and spurred me to more desperate effort; but before we neared the perilous pass the banks grew so uneven and the underbrush so dense that my pursuer was much delayed, and consequently fell behind. The current quickening its speed at the same time, I was a good ten yards in the lead, as my canoe slid through the gorge and out into the white moonlight of one of the wider reaches of the stream.

“Here I slackened my pace in order to recover my wind; and the panther made up his lost ground. For the time, I was out of his reach, and all he could do was to scream savagely. This, I supposed, was to summon his mate to the noble hunting he had provided for her; but to my inexpressible satisfaction no mate came. The beauty and the weirdness of the moonlit woods were now quite lost upon me. I saw only that long, fierce, light-bounding figure which so inexorably kept pace with me.

“To save my powers for some possible emergency, I resolved

to content myself, for the time, with a very moderate degree of haste. The panther was in no way pressed to keep up with me. Suddenly he darted forward at his utmost speed. For a moment this did not trouble me; but then I awoke to its possible meaning. He was planning, evidently, an ambuscade, and I must keep an eye upon him.

“The order of the chase was promptly reversed, and I set out at once in a desperate pursuit. The obstructed shores and the increasing current favored me, so that he found it hard to shake me off. For the next half mile I just managed to keep up with him. Then came another of those quieter reaches, and my pursued pursuer at last got out of sight.

“Again I paused, not only to take breath, but to try and discover the brute’s purpose in leaving me. All at once it flashed into my mind. Just before the river widens into Second Lake, there occurs a lively and somewhat broken rapid. As there was moonlight, and I knew the channels well, I had no dread of this rapid till suddenly I remembered three large bowlders crossing the stream like stepping-stones.

“It was plain to me that this was the point my adversary was anxious to reach ahead of me. These bowlders were so placed that he could easily spring from one to the other dry-shod, and his chance of intercepting me would be excellent. I almost lost courage. The best thing I could do under the circumstances was to save my strength to the utmost; so for a time I did little more than steer the canoe. When at last I rounded a turn, and saw just

ahead of me the white, thin-crested, singing ripples of the rapid, I was not at all surprised to see also the panther, crouched on one of the rocks in mid-stream.

“At this point the river was somewhat spread out, and the banks were low, so the moonlight showed me the channel quite clearly. You’ll understand better when we run through in a day or two. I laid aside my paddle and took up the more trusty white spruce pole. With it I “snubbed” the canoe firmly, letting her drop down the slope inch by inch, while I took a cool and thorough survey of the ripples and cross-currents.

“From the sloping shoulder of the rock lying nearest to the left-hand bank a strong cross-current took a slant sharply over toward the middle channel. I decided to stake my fate on the assistance of this cross-current. Gradually I snubbed the canoe over to the left bank, and then gave her her head. The shores slipped past. The rocks, with that crouching sentinel on the central one, seemed to glide up-stream to meet me. I was almost in the passage when, with a superb bound, the panther shot through the moonlight and lit upon the rock I was approaching! As he poised himself, gaining his balance with some difficulty on the narrow foothold, a strong lunge with my pole twisted the canoe into the swirl of that cross-current; and with the next thrust I slid like lightning down the middle channel before my adversary had more than got himself fairly turned around! With a shout of exultation I raced down the rest of the incline and into widening reaches, safe from pursuit. The panther, screaming

angrily, followed me for a time; but soon the receding shores placed such a distance between us that I ceased to regard him. Presently I bade him a final farewell, and headed across the lake for the spot where the camp-fire was waving me a ruddy welcome."

"That's getting pretty near home," remarked Ranolf, glancing apprehensively into the gloom behind the camp. "You don't suppose that chap would be waiting around here for you, Stranion? If so, I hope he won't mistake me for you!"

"Let Sam give us something cheerful now!" demanded Magnus.

"Well," said Sam, "I'll give you a story of the lumber-camps. I'll call it —

‘BRUIN AND THE COOK.’

"As the O. M. is going to dress up our yarns for the cold light of print, I must be allowed to preface the story with a few introductory remarks on the life of the lumbermen in winter. Stranion and the O. M. know all about that; but the rest of you fellows never go to the lumber-camps, you know.

"To one who visits the winter camps here in our backwoods, the life led by the loggers is likely to seem monotonous after the strangeness of it has worn off. The sounds of the chopping, the shouting, the clanking of the teams, afford ample warning to all the wild creatures of the woods, who thereupon generally agree

in giving a wide berth to a neighborhood which has suddenly grown so populous and noisy.

“In chopping and hauling logs the lumbermen are at work unremittingly from dawn until sun-down, and at night they have little energy to expend on the hunting of bears or panthers. The bunks and the blankets exert an overwhelming attraction; and by the time the men have concluded their after-supper smoke, and the sound of a few rough songs has died away, the wild beasts may creep near enough to smell the pork and beans, and may prowl about the camp until dawn, with small fear of molestation from the sleepers within.

“At intervals, however, the monotony of camp-life is broken. Something occurs to remind the careless woodsmen that, though in the wilderness, indeed, they are yet not truly of it. They are made suddenly aware of those shy but savage forces which, regarding them ever as trespassers, have been keeping them under an angry and eager surveillance. The spirit of the violated forest makes a swift and sometimes effectual, but always unexpected, stroke for vengeance.

“A yoke of oxen are straining at their load: a great branch reaching down catches the nearest ox by the horn, and the poor brute falls in its track with its neck broken. A stout sapling is bent to the ground by a weight of ice and snow: some thaw or the shock of a passing team releases it, and by the fierce recoil a horse's leg is shattered.

“A lumberman has strayed off into the woods by himself,

perchance to gather spruce-gum for his friends in the settlements, and he is found, days afterwards, half-eaten by bears and foxes. A solitary chopper throws down his axe and leans against a tree to rest and dream, and a panther drops from the branches above and tears him.

“Yet such vengeance is accomplished but seldom, and makes no permanent impression on the heedless woodsman. His onward march is inexorable.

“The cook, it must be borne in mind, is a most important personage in the lumber-camp. This I say of camp-cooks in general, and I assert it in particular of the cook who figures as one of the heroes in my story. The other hero is the bear.

“It was a bright March morning at Nicholson’s camp over on Salmon River. There had been a heavy thaw for some days, and the snowbanks under the eaves of the camp were shrinking rapidly. The bright chips about the door, the trampled straw and fodder around the stable, were steaming and soaking under the steady sun. Such winds as were stirring abroad that day were quite shut off from the camp by the dark surrounding woods.

“From the protruding stovepipe, which did duty as a chimney, a faint blue wreath of smoke curled lazily. The cook had the camp all to himself for a while; for the teams and choppers were at work a mile away, and the ‘cookee,’ as the cook’s assistant is called, had betaken himself to a neighboring pond to fish for trout through the ice.

“The dishes were washed, the camp was in order, and in a little

while it would be time to get the dinner ready. The inevitable pork and beans were slowly boiling, and an appetizing fragrance was abroad on the quiet air. The cook decided to snatch a wink of sleep in his bunk beneath the eaves. He had a spare half-hour before him, and under his present circumstances he knew no better way of spending it.

“The weather being mild, he left the camp-door wide open, and, swinging up to his berth, soon had himself luxuriously bedded in blankets, – his own and as many other fellows’ blankets as he liked. He began to doze and dream. He dreamed of summer fields, and then of a lively Sunday-school picnic, and at last of the music of a band which he heard crashing in his ears. Then the cymbals and the big drum grew unbearably loud, and, waking with a start, he remembered where he was, and thrust his head in astonishment over the edge of the bunk. The sight that met his eyes filled him with alarm and indignation.

“The prolonged thaw had brought out the bears from their snug winter quarters; and now, in a very bad humor from having been waked up too soon, they were prowling through the forest in unusual numbers. Food was scarce; in fact, times were very hard with them, and they were not only bad-humored, but lean and hungry withal.

“To one particularly hungry bear the smell of our cook’s simmering pork had come that morning like the invitation to a feast. The supposed invitation had been accepted with a rapturous alacrity. Bruin had found the door open, the coast

clear, the quarters very inviting. With the utmost good faith he had entered upon his fortune. To find the source of that entrancing fragrance had been to his trained nose a simple matter.

“While cook slept sweetly, Bruin had rooted off the cover of the pot, and this was the beginning of cook’s dream.

“But the pot was hot, and the first mouthful of the savory mess made him yell with rage and pain. At this point the trumpets and clarions grew shrill in cook’s dreaming ears.

“Then an angry sweep of the great paw had dashed pot and kettle off the stove in a thunder of crashing iron and clattering tins. This was the point at which cook’s dream had attained overwhelming reality.

“What met his round-eyed gaze, as he sat up in his blankets, was an angry bear, dancing about in a confusion of steam and smoke and beans and kettles, making ineffectual snatches at a lump of scalding pork upon the floor.

“After a moment of suspense, cook rose softly and crept to the other end of the bunks, where a gun was kept. To his disgust the weapon was unloaded. But the click of the lock had caught the bear’s attention. Glancing up at the bunk above him, the brute’s eye detected the shrinking cook, and straightway he overflowed with wrath. Here, evidently, was the author of his discomfort.

“With smarting jaws and vengeful paws he made a dash for the bunk. Its edge was nearly seven feet from the floor, so Bruin had to do some clambering. As his head appeared over the edge,

and his great paws took firm hold upon the clapboard rim of the bunk, cook, now grown desperate, struck at him wildly with the heavy butt of the gun. But Bruin is always a skilful boxer. With an upward stroke he warded off the blow, and sent the weapon spinning across the camp. At the same time, however, his weight proved too much for the frail clapboard to which he was holding, and back he fell on the floor with a shock like an earthquake.

“This repulse – which, of course, he credited to the cook – only filled him with tenfold greater fury, and at once he sprang back to the assault; but the delay, however brief, had given poor cook time to grasp an idea, which he proceeded to act upon with eagerness. He saw that the hole in the roof through which the stovepipe protruded was large enough to give his body passage. Snatching at a light rafter above his head, he swung himself out of the bunk, and kicked the stovepipe from its place. The sections fell with loud clatter upon the stove and the bear, for a moment disconcerting Bruin’s plans. From the rafter it was an easy reach to the opening in the roof, and as Bruin gained the empty bunk and stretched his paw eagerly up toward his intended victim on the rafter, the intended victim slipped with the greatest promptitude through the hole.

“At this point the cook drew a long breath, and persuaded his heart to go down out of his throat, where it had been since he waked, and resume its proper functions.

“His first thought was to drop from the roof and run for help, but fortunately he changed his mind. The bear was no fool. No

sooner had the cook got safely out upon the roof than Bruin rushed forth from the camp-door, expecting to catch him as he came down.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.