

SHARP DALLAS LORE

SUMMER

Dallas Sharp

Summer

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INTRODUCTION

In this fourth and last volume of these outdoor books I have taken you into the summer fields and, shall I hope? left you there. After all, what better thing could I do? And as I leave you there, let me say one last serious word concerning the purpose of such books as these and the large subject of nature-study in general.

I believe that a child's interest in outdoor life is a kind of hunger, as natural as his interest in bread and butter. He cannot live on bread and butter alone, but he ought not to try to live without them. He cannot be educated on nature-study alone, but he ought not to be educated without it. To learn to obey and reason and feel – these are the triple ends of education, and the greatest of these is to learn to feel. The teacher's word for obedience; the arithmetic for reasoning; and for feeling, for the cultivation of the imagination, for the power to respond quickly and deeply, give the child the out-of-doors.

“If I could teach my Rugby boys but one thing,” said Dr. Arnold, “that one thing should be poetry.” Why? Because poetry draws out the imagination, quickens and refines and deepens the emotions. The first great source of poetry is Nature. Give the child poetry; and give him the inspiration of the poem, the teacher of the poet – give him Nature. Make a poet of the child, who is already a poet born.

How can so essential, so fundamental a need become a mere fad of education? A child wants first to eat, then to play, then he wants to know – particularly he wants to know the animals. And he does know an elephant from a kangaroo long before he knows a Lincoln from a Napoleon; just so he wants to go to the woods long before he asks to visit a library.

The study of the ant in the school-yard walk, the leaves on the school-yard trees, the clouds over the school-house roof, the sights, sounds, odors coming in at the school-room windows, these are essential studies for art and letters, to say nothing of life.

And this is the way serious men and women think about it. Captain Scott, dying in the Antarctic snows, wrote in his last letter to his wife: “Make our boy interested in natural history if you can. It is better than games. Keep him in the open air.”

I hope that these four volumes may help to interest you in natural history, that they may be the means of taking you into the open air of the fields many times the seasons through.

Dallas Lore Sharp.

Mullein Hill, February, 1914.

CHAPTER I

THE SUMMER AFIELD

The word summer, being interpreted, means vacation; and vacation, being interpreted, means – so many things that I have not space in this book to name them. Yet how can there be a vacation without mountains, or seashore, or the fields, or the forests – days out of doors? My ideal vacation would have to be spent in the open; and this book, the larger part of it, is the record of one of my summer vacations – the vacation of the summer of 1912. That was an ideal vacation, and along with my account of it I wish to give you some hints on how to make the most of your summer chance to tramp the fields and woods.

For the real lover of nature is a tramp; not the kind of tramp that walks the railroad-ties and carries his possessions in a tomato-can, but one who follows the cow-paths to the fields, who treads the rabbit-roads in the woods, watching the ways of the wild things that dwell in the tree-tops, and in the deepest burrows under ground.

Do not tell anybody, least of all yourself, that you love the out-of-doors, unless you have your own path to the woods, your own cross-cut to the pond, your own particular huckleberry-patch and fishing-holes and friendships in the fields. The winds, the rain, the stars, the green grass, even the birds and a multitude of other wild folk try to meet you more than halfway, try to seek you out even in the heart of the great city; but the great out-of-doors you must seek, for it is not in books, nor in houses, nor in cities. It is out at the end of the car-line or just beyond the back-yard fence, maybe – far enough away, anyhow, to make it necessary for you to put on your tramping shoes and with your good stout stick go forth.

You must learn to be a good trumper. You thought you learned how to walk soon after you got out of the cradle, and perhaps you did, but most persons only know how to hobble when they get into the unpaved paths of the woods.

With stout, well-fitting shoes, broad in the toe and heel; light, stout clothes that will not catch the briars, good bird-glasses, and a bite of lunch against the noon, swing out on your *legs*; breathe to the bottom of your lungs; balance your body on your hips, not on your collar-bones, and, going leisurely, but not slowly (for crawling is deadly dull), do ten miles up a mountain-side or through the brush; and if at the end you feel like *eating up* ten miles more, then you may know that you can walk, can *tramp*, and are in good shape for the summer.

In your tramping-kit you need: a pocket-knife; some string; a pair of field-glasses; a botany-can or fish-basket on your back; and perhaps a notebook. This is all and more than you need for every tramp. To these things might be added a light camera. It depends upon what you go for. I have been afield all my life and have never owned or used a camera. But there are a good many things that I have never done. A camera may add a world of interest to your summer, so if you find use for a camera, don't fail to make one a part of your tramping outfit.

After all, what you carry on your back or on your feet or in your hands does not matter half so much as what you carry in your head and heart – your eye, and spirit, and purpose. For instance, when you go into the fields have some purpose in your going besides the indefinite desire to get out of doors.

If you long for the wide sky and the wide winds and the wide slopes of green, then that is a real and a definite desire. You want to get out, OUT, OUT, because you have been shut *in*. Very good; for you will get what you wish, what you go out to get. The point is this: always go out for something. Never yawn and slouch out to the woods as you might to the corner grocery store, because you don't know how else to kill time.

Go with some purpose; because you wish to visit some particular spot, see some bird, find some flower, catch some – fish! Anything that takes you into the open is good – ploughing, hoeing,

chopping, fishing, berrying, botanizing, tramping. The aimless person anywhere is a failure, and he is sure to get lost in the woods!

It is a good plan to go frequently over the same fields, taking the beaten path, watching for the familiar things, until you come to know your haunt as thoroughly as the fox or the rabbit knows his. Don't be afraid of using up a particular spot. The more often you visit a place the richer you will find it to be in interest for you.

Now, do not limit your interest and curiosity to any one kind of life or to any set of things out of doors. Do not let your likes or your prejudices interfere with your seeing the whole out-of-doors with all its manifold life, for it is all interrelated, all related to you, all of interest and meaning. The clover blossom and the bumblebee that carries the fertilizing pollen are related; the bumblebee and the mouse that eats up its grubs are related; and every one knows that mice and cats are related; thus the clover, the bumblebee, the mouse, the cat, and, finally, the farmer, are all so interrelated that if the farmer keeps a cat, the cat will catch the mice, the mice cannot eat the young bumblebees, the bumblebees can fertilize the clover, and the clover can make seed. So if the farmer wants clover seed to sow down a new field with, he must keep a cat.

I think it is well for you to have some one thing in which you are particularly interested. It may be flowers or birds or shells or minerals. But as the whole is greater than any of its parts, so a love and knowledge of nature, of the earth and the sky over your head and under your feet, with all that lives with you there, is more than a knowledge of its birds or trees or reptiles.

But be on your guard against the purpose to spread yourselves over too much. Don't be thin and superficial. Don't be satisfied with learning the long Latin names of things while never watching the ways of the things that have the names. As they sat on the porch, so the story goes, the school trustee called attention to a familiar little orange-colored bug, with black spots on his back, that was crawling on the floor.

"I s'pose you know what that is?" he said.

"Yes," replied the applicant, with conviction; "that is a *Coccinella septempunctata*."

"Young man," was the rejoinder, "a feller as don't know a ladybug when he sees it can't get my vote for teacher in this deestric."

The "trustee" was right; for what is the use of knowing that the little ladybug is *Coc-ci-nel'-la sep-tem-punc-ta'-ta* when you do not know that she is a ladybug, and that you ought to say to her: —

"Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home;
Your house is on fire, your children alone"?

Let us say, now, that you are spending your vacation in the edge of the country within twenty miles of a great city such as Boston. That might bring you out at Hingham, where I am spending mine. In such an ordinary place (if any place *is* ordinary,) what might you expect to see and watch during the summer?

Sixty species of birds, to begin with! They will keep you busy all summer. The wild animals, beasts, that you will find depend so very much upon your locality — woods, waters, rocks, etc. — that it is hard to say how many they will be. Here in my woods you might come upon three or four species of mice, three species of squirrels, the mink, the muskrat, the weasel, the mole, the shrew, the fox, the skunk, the rabbit, and even a wild deer. Of reptiles and amphibians you would see several more species than of fur-bearing animals, — six snakes, four common turtles, two salamanders, frogs, toads, newts, — a wonderfully interesting group, with a real live rattler among them if you should go over to the Blue Hills, fifteen miles away.

You will go many times into the fields before you can make of the reptiles your friends and neighbors. But by and by you will watch them and note their ways with as much interest as you watch

the other wild folk about you. It is a pretty shallow lover of nature who jumps upon a little snake with both feet, or who shivers when a little salamander drops out of the leaf-mould at his feet.

And what shall I say of the fishes? There are a dozen of them in the stream and ponds within the compass of my haunt. They are a fascinating family, and one very little watched by the ordinary trumper. But *you* are not ordinary. Quiet and patience and much putting together of scraps of observations will be necessary if you are to get at the whole story of any fish's life. The story will be worth it, however.

No, I shall not even try to *number* the insects – the butterflies, beetles, moths, wasps, bees, bugs, ticks, mites, and such small “deer” as you will find in the round of your summer's tramp. Nor shall I try to name the flowers and trees, the ferns and mosses. It is with the common things that you ought now to become familiar, and one summer is all too short for the things you ought to see and hear and do in your vacation out of doors.

CHAPTER II

THE WILD ANIMALS AT PLAY

The watcher of wild animals never gets used to the sight of their mirthless sport. In all other respects animal play is entirely human.

A great deal of human play is serious – desperately serious on the football-field, and at the card-table, as when a lonely player is trying to kill time with solitaire.

I have watched a great ungainly hippopotamus for hours trying to do the same solemn thing by cuffing a croquet-ball back and forth from one end of his cage to the other. His keepers told me that without the plaything the poor caged giant would fret and worry himself to death. It was his game of solitaire.

In all their games of rivalry the animals are serious as humans, and, forgetting the fun, often fall to fighting – a sad case, indeed. But brutes are brutes. We cannot expect anything better of the animals. Only this morning the whole flock of chickens in the hen-yard started suddenly on the wild flap to see which would beat to the back fence and wound up on the “line” in a free fight, two of the cockerels tearing the feathers from each other in a desperate set-to.

You have seen puppies fall out in the same human fashion, and kittens also, and older folk as well. I have seen a game of wood-tag among friendly gray squirrels come to a finish in a fight. As the crows pass over during the winter afternoon, you will notice their play – racing each other through the air, diving, swooping, cawing in their fun, when suddenly some one’s temper snaps, and there is a mix-up in the air.

They can get angry, but they cannot laugh. I once saw what I thought was a twinkle of merriment, however, in an elephant’s eye. It was at the circus several years ago. The keeper had just set down for one of the elephants a bucket of water which a perspiring youth had brought in. The big beast sucked it quietly up, – the whole of it, – swung gently around as if to thank the perspiring boy, then soused him, the whole bucketful! Everybody roared, and one of the other elephants joined in with trumpeting, so huge and jolly was the joke.

The elephant who played the trick looked solemn enough, except for a twitch at the lips and a glint in the eye. There is something of a smile about every elephant’s lips, to be sure, and fun is so contagious that one should hesitate to say that he saw an elephant laugh. But if that elephant didn’t laugh, it was not his fault.

From the elephant to the infusorian, the microscopic animal of a single cell known as the paramœcium, is a far cry – to the extreme opposite end of the animal kingdom, worlds apart. Yet I have seen *Paramœcium caudatum* at play in a drop of water under a compound microscope, as I have seen elephants at play in their big bath-tub at the zoölogical gardens.

Place a drop of stagnant water under your microscope and watch these atoms of life for yourself. Invisible to the naked eye, they are easily followed on the slide as they skate and whirl and chase one another to the boundaries of their playground and back again, first one of them “it,” then another. They stop to eat, they slow up to divide their single-celled bodies into two cells, the two cells now two living creatures where a moment before they were but one, both of them swimming off immediately to feed and multiply and play.

Play seems to be as natural and as necessary to the wild animals as it is to human beings. Like us the animals play hardest while young, but as some human children never outgrow their youth and love of play, so there are old animals that never grow too fat nor too stiff nor too stupid to play.

The condition of the body has a great deal to do with the state of the spirit. The sleek, lithe otter could not possibly grow fat. He keeps in trim because he cannot help it, perhaps, but however that may be, he is a very boy for play, and even goes so far as to build himself a slide or chute for

the fun of diving down it into the water. A writer in one of the magazines tells of an otter in the New York Zoölogical Park that swam and dived with a round stone balanced on his head.

Building a slide is more than we children used to do, for we had ready-made for us grandfather's two big slanting cellar-doors, down which we slid and slid and slid till the wood was scoured white and slippery with the sliding. The otter loves to slide. Up he climbs on the bank, then down he goes – splash – into the stream. Up he climbs and down he goes – time after time, day after day. There is nothing like a slide, unless it is a cellar-door.

How much of a necessity to the otter is his play, one would like to know – what he would give up for it, and how he would do deprived of it. In the case of Pups, my neighbor's beautiful young collie, play seems more needful than food. There are no children, no one, to play with him there, so that the sight of my small boys sets him almost frantic.

His efforts to induce a hen or a rooster to play with him are pathetic. The hen cannot understand. She hasn't a particle of play in her anyhow, but Pups cannot get that through his head. He runs rapidly around her, drops on all fours flat, swings his tail, cocks his ears, looks appealingly and barks a few little cackle-barks, as nearly hen-like as he can bark them, then dashes off and whirls back – while the hen picks up another bug. She never sees Pups. The old white coon cat is better; but she is usually up the miff-tree. Pups steps on her, knocks her over, or otherwise offends, especially when he tags her out into the fields and spoils her hunting. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ought to send some child or puppy out to play with Pups of a Saturday.

I doubt if among the lower forms of animals play holds any such prominent place as with the dog and the keen-witted, intelligent otter. To catch these lower animals at play is a rare experience. One of our naturalists describes the game of "follow my leader," as he watched it played by a school of minnows – a most unusual record, but not at all hard to believe, for I saw recently, from the bridge in the Boston Public Garden, a school of goldfish playing at something very much like it.

This naturalist was lying stretched out upon an old bridge, watching the minnows through a large crack between the planks, when he saw one leap out of the water over a small twig floating at the surface. Instantly another minnow broke the water and flipped over the twig, followed by another and another, the whole school, as so many sheep, or so many children, following the leader over the twig.

The love of play seems to be one of the elemental needs of all life above the plants, and the games of us human children seem to have been played before the dry land was, when there were only water babies in the world, for certainly the fish never learned "follow my leader" from us. Nor did my young bees learn from us their game of "prisoners' base" which they play almost every summer noontime in front of the hives. And what is the game the flies play about the cord of the drop-light in the centre of the kitchen ceiling?

One of the most interesting animal games that I ever saw was played by a flock of butterflies on the very top of Mount Hood, whose pointed snow-piled peak looks down from the clouds over the whole vast State of Oregon.

Mount Hood is an ancient volcano, eleven thousand two hundred twenty-five feet high. Some seven thousand feet or more up, we came to "Tie-up Rock" – the place on the climb where the glacier snows lay before us and we were tied up to one another and all of us fastened by rope to the guide.

From this point to the peak, it was sheer deep snow. For the last eighteen hundred feet we clung to a rope that was anchored on the edge of the crater at the summit, and cut our steps as we climbed.

Once we had gained the peak, we lay down behind a pile of sulphurous rock, out of the way of the cutting wind, and watched the steam float up from the crater, with the widest world in view that I ever turned my eyes upon.

The draft pulled hard about the openings among the rock-piles, but hardest up a flue, or chimney, that was left in the edge of the crater-rim where parts of the rock had fallen away.

As we lay at the side of this flue, we soon discovered that butterflies were hovering about us; no, not hovering, but flying swiftly up between the rocks from somewhere down the flue. I could

scarcely believe my eyes. What could any living thing be doing here? – and of all things, butterflies? This was three or four thousand feet above the last vestige of vegetation, a mere point of volcanic rock (the jagged edge-piece of an old crater) wrapped in eternal ice and snow, with sulphurous gases pouring over it, and across it blowing a wind that would freeze as soon as the sun was out of the sky.

But here were real butterflies. I caught two or three of them and found them to be vanessas (*Vanessa californica*), a close relative of our mourning-cloak butterfly. They were all of one species, apparently, but what were they doing here?

Scrambling to the top of the piece of rock behind which I had been resting, I saw that the peak was alive with butterflies, and that they were flying – over my head, out down over the crater, and out of sight behind the peak, whence they reappeared, whirling up the flue past me on the wings of the draft that pulled hard through it, to sail down over the crater again, and again to be caught by the draft and pulled up the flue, to their evident delight, up and out over the peak, where they could again take wings, as boys take their sleds, and so down again for the fierce upward draft that bore them whirling over Mount Hood's pointed peak.

Here they were, thousands of feet above the snow-line, where there was no sign of vegetation, where the heavy vapors made the air to smell, where the very next day a wild snowstorm wrapped its frozen folds about the peak – here they were, butterflies, playing, a host of them, like so many schoolboys on the first coasting snow!

CHAPTER III

A CHAPTER OF THINGS TO SEE THIS SUMMER

I

The dawn, the breaking dawn! I know nothing lovelier, nothing fresher, nothing newer, purer, sweeter than a summer dawn. I am just back from one – from the woods and cornfields wet with dew, the meadows and streams white with mist, and all the world of paths and fences running off into luring spaces of wavering, lifting, beckoning horizons where shrouded forms were moving and hidden voices calling. By noontime the buzz-saw of the cicada will be ripping the dried old stick of this August day into splinters and sawdust. No one could imagine that this midsummer noon at 90° in the shade could have had so Maylike a beginning.

II

I said in “The Spring of the Year” that you should see a farmer ploughing, then a few weeks later the field of sprouting corn. Now in July or August you must see that field in silk and tassel, blade and stalk standing high over your head.

You might catch the same sight of wealth in a cotton-field, if cotton is “king” in your section; or in a vast wheat-field, if wheat is your king; or in a potato-field if you live in Maine – but no, not in a potato-field. It is all underground in a potato-field. Nor can cotton in the South, or wheat in the Northwest, give you quite the *depth* and the ranked and ordered wealth of long, straight lines of tall corn.

Then to hear a summer rain sweep down upon it and the summer wind run swiftly through it! You must see a great field of standing corn.

III

Keep out from under all trees, stand away from all tall poles, but get somewhere in the open and watch a blue-black thunderstorm come up. It is one of the wonders of summer, one of the shows of the sky, a thing of terrible beauty that I must confess I cannot look at without dread and a feeling of awe that rests like a load upon me.

“All heaven and earth are still – though not in sleep,
But breathless, as we grow when feeling most;
And silent, as we stand in thoughts too deep: —

.....

The sky is changed! – and such a change! Oh night,
And storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous strong,
Yet lovely in your strength.....

..... Far along,

From peak to peak the rattling crags among,
Leaps the live thunder! Not from one lone cloud,
But every mountain now hath found a tongue,
And Jura answers, through her misty shroud,

Back to the joyous Alps who call to her aloud.”

IV

But there are many smaller, individual things to be seen this summer, and among them, notable for many reasons, is a hummingbird’s nest. “When completed it is scarcely larger than an English walnut and is usually saddled on a small horizontal limb of a tree or shrub frequently many feet from the ground. It is composed almost entirely of soft plant fibers, fragments of spiders’ webs sometimes being used to hold them in shape. The sides are thickly studded with bits of lichen, and practiced, indeed, is the eye of the man who can distinguish it from a knot on the limb.”

This is the smallest of birds’ nests and quite as rare and difficult to find as any single thing that you can go out to look for. You will stumble upon one now and then; but not many in a whole lifetime. Let it be a test of your keen eye – this finding of a little hummer’s nest with its two white eggs the size of small pea-beans or its two tiny young that are up and off on their marvelous wings within three weeks from the time the eggs are laid!

V

Have you read Mr. William L. Finley’s story of the California condor’s nest? The hummingbird young is out and gone within three weeks; but the condor young is still in the care of its watchful parents three months after it is hatched. You ought to watch the slow, guarded youth of one of the larger hawks or owls during the summer. Such birds build very early, – before the snow is gone sometimes, – but they are to be seen feeding their young far into the summer. The wide variety in bird-life, both in size and habits, will be made very plain to you if you will watch the nests of two such birds as the hummer and the vulture or the eagle.

VI

This is the season of flowers. But what among them should you especially see? Some time ago one of the school-teachers near me brought in a list of a *dozen* species of wild orchids, gathered out of the meadows, bogs, and woods about the neighborhood. Can you do as well?

Suppose, then, that you try to find as many. They were the pink lady’s-slipper; the yellow lady’s-slipper; the yellow fringed-orchis (*Habenaria ciliaris*); the ladies’-tresses, two species; the rattlesnake-plantain; arethusa, or Indian pink; calopogon, or grass pink; pogonia, or snake-mouth (*ophioglossoides* and *verticillata*); the ragged fringed-orchis; and the showy or spring orchis. Arethusa and the showy orchis really belong to the spring but the others will be task enough for you, and one that will give point and purpose to your wanderings afield this summer.

VII

There are a certain number of moths and butterflies that you should see and know also. If one could come to know, say, one hundred and fifty flowers and the moths and butterflies that visit them (for the flower and its insect pollen-carrier are to be thought of and studied together), one would have an excellent speaking acquaintance with the blossoming out-of-doors.

Now, among the butterflies you ought to know the mourning-cloak, or vanessa; the big red-brown milkweed butterfly; the big yellow tiger swallowtail; the small yellow cabbage butterfly; the painted beauty; the red admiral; the common fritillary; the common wood-nymph – but I have named

enough for this summer, in spite of the fact that I have not named the green-clouded or Troilus butterfly, and Asterias, the black swallowtail, and the red-spotted purple, and the viceroy.

Among the moths to see are the splendid Promethea, Cecropia, bullseye, Polyphemus, and Luna, to say nothing of the hummingbird moth, and the sphinx, or hawk, moths, especially the large one that feeds as a caterpillar upon the tomato-vines, *Ma-cros'-i-la-quin-que-mac-u-la'-ta*.

VIII

There is a like list of interesting beetles and other insects, that play a large part in even *your* affairs, which you ought to watch during the summer: the honeybee, the big droning golden bumblebee, the large white-faced hornet that builds the paper nests in the bushes and trees, the gall-flies, the ichneumon-flies, the burying beetle, the tumble-bug beetle, the dragon-fly, the caddis-fly – these are only a few of a whole world of insect folk about you, whose habits and life-histories are of utmost importance and of tremendous interest. You will certainly believe it if you will read the Peckhams' book called "Wasps, Social and Solitary," or the beautiful and fascinating insect stories by the great French entomologist Fabre. Get also "Every-day Butterflies," by Scudder; and "Moths and Butterflies," by Miss Dickerson, and "Insect Life," by Kellogg.

IX

You see I cannot stop with this list of the things. That is the trouble with summer – there is too much of it while it lasts, too much variety and abundance of life. One is simply compelled to limit one's self to some particular study, and to pick up mere scraps from other fields.

But, to come back to the larger things of the out-of-doors, you should see the mist some summer morning very early or some summer evening, sheeted and still over a winding stream or pond, especially in the evening when the sun has gone down behind the hill, the flame has faded from the sky, and over the rim of the circling slopes pours the soft, cool twilight, with a breeze as soft and cool, and a spirit that is prayer. For then from out the deep shadows of the wooded shore, out over the pond, a thin white veil will come creeping – the mist, the breath of the sleeping water, the soul of the pond!

X

You should see it rain down little toads this summer —*if you can!* There are persons who claim to have seen it. But I never have. I have stood on Maurice River Bridge, however, and apparently had them pelting down upon my feet as the big drops of the July shower struck the planks – myriads of tiny toads covering the bridge across the river! Did they rain down? No, they had been hiding in the dirt between the planks and hopped out to meet the sweet rain and to soak their little thirsty skins full.

XI

You should see a cowbird's young in a vireo's nest and the efforts of the poor deceived parents to satisfy its insatiable appetite at the expense of their own young ones' lives! Such a sight will set you to thinking.

XII

I shall not tell you what else you should see, for the whole book could be filled with this one chapter, and then you might lose your forest in your trees. The individual tree is good to look at – the mighty wide-limbed hemlock or pine; but so is a whole dark, solemn forest of hemlocks and pines good to look at. Let us come to the out-of-doors with our study of the separate, individual plant or thing; but let us *go on to Nature*, and not stop with the individual thing.

CHAPTER IV

THE COYOTE OF PELICAN POINT

“We have stopped the plumers,” said the game-warden, “and we are holding the market-hunters to something like decency; but there’s a pot-hunter yonder on Pelican Point that I’ve got to do up or lose my job.”

Pelican Point was the end of a long, narrow peninsula that ran out into the lake, from the opposite shore, twelve miles across from us. We were in the Klamath Lake Reservation in southern Oregon, one of the greatest wild-bird preserves in the world.

Over the point, as we drew near, the big white pelicans were winging, and among them, as our boat came up to the rocks, rose a colony of black cormorants. The peninsula is chiefly of volcanic origin, composed of crumbling rock and lava, and ends in well-stratified cliffs at the point. Patches of scraggly sagebrush grew here and there, and out near the cliffs on the sloping lava sides was a field of golden California poppies.

The gray, dusty ridge in the hot sun, with cliff swallows and cormorants and the great pouched pelicans as inhabitants, seemed the last place that a pot-hunter would frequent. What could a pot-hunter find here? I wondered.

We were pulling the boat up on the sand at a narrow neck in the peninsula, when the warden touched my arm. “Up there near the sky-line among the sage! What a shot!”

I was some seconds in making out the head and shoulders of a coyote that was watching us from the top of the ridge.

“The rascal knows,” went on the warden, “I have no gun; he can smell a gun clear across the lake. I have tried for three years to get that fellow. He’s the terror of the whole region, and especially of the Point; if I don’t get him soon, he’ll clean out the pelican colony.

“Why don’t I shoot him? Poison him? Trap him? I have offered fifty dollars for his hide. Why don’t I? I’ll show you. Now you watch the critter as I lead you up the slope toward him.”

We had not taken a dozen steps when I found myself staring hard at the place where the coyote had been, but not at the coyote, for he was gone. He had vanished before my eyes. I had not seen him move, although I had been watching him steadily.

“Queer, isn’t it?” said the warden. “It’s not his particular dodge, for every old coyote that has been hunted learns to work it; but I never knew one that had it down so fine as this sinner. There’s next to nothing here for him to skulk behind. Why, he has given my dog the slip right here on the bare rock! But I’ll fix him yet.”

I did not have to be persuaded to stay overnight with the warden for the coyote-hunt the next day. The warden, I found, had fallen in with a Mr. Harris, a homesteader, who had been something of a professional coyote-hunter. Harris had just arrived in southern Oregon, and had brought with him his dogs, a long, graceful greyhound, and his fighting mate, a powerful Russian wolfhound; both were crack coyote dogs from down Saskatchewan. He had accepted the warden’s offer of fifty dollars for the hide of the coyote of Pelican Point, and was now on his way round the lake.

The outfit appeared late the next day, and consisted of the two dogs, a horse and buckboard, and a big, empty dry-goods box.

I had hunted possums in the gum swamps of the South with a stick and a gunny-sack, but this rig, on the rocky, roadless shores of the lake – a dry-goods box for coyotes! – beat any hunting combination I had ever seen.

We had pitched the tent on the south shore of the point where the peninsula joined the mainland, and were finishing our supper, when not far from us, back on shore, we heard the doleful yowl of the coyote.

We were on our feet in an instant.

“There he is,” said the warden, “lonesome for a little play with your dogs, Mr. Harris.”

There was still an hour and a half of good light, and Harris untied his dogs. I had never seen the coyote hunted, and was greatly interested. Harris, with his dogs close in hand, led us directly away from where we had heard the coyote bark. Then we stopped and sat down. At my look of inquiry, Harris smiled.

“Oh, no, we’re not after coyotes to-night, not *that* coyote, anyhow,” he said. “You know a coyote is made up of equal parts of curiosity, cowardice, and craft; and it’s a long hunt unless you can get a lead on his curiosity. We are not out for *him*. He sees that. In fact, we’ll amble back now – but we’ll manage to get up along the crest of that little ridge where he is sitting, so that the dogs can follow him whichever way he runs. You hunt coyotes wholly by sight, you know.”

The little trick worked perfectly. The coyote, curious to see what we were doing, had risen to his feet, and stood, plainly outlined against the sky. He was entirely unsuspecting, and as we approached, only edged and backed, more apparently to get a sight of the dogs behind us than through any fear.

Suddenly Harris stepped from before the dogs, pointed them toward the coyote, and slipped their leashes. The hounds were trained to the work. There was just an instant’s pause, a quick yelp, then two doubling, reaching forms ahead of us, with a little line of dust between.

The coyote saw them coming, and started to run, not hurriedly, however, for he had had many a run before. He was not afraid, and kept looking behind to see what manner of dog was after him this time.

But he was not long in making up his mind that this was an entirely new kind, for in less than three minutes the hounds had halved the distance that separated him from them. At first, the big wolfhound was in the lead. Then, as if it had taken him till this time to find all four of his long legs, the greyhound pulled himself together, and in a burst of speed that was astonishing, passed his heavier companion.

We raced along the ridge to see the finish. But the coyote ahead of the dogs was no novice. He knew the game perfectly. He saw the gap closing behind him. Had he been young, he would have been seized by fear; would have darted right and left, mouthing and snapping in abject terror. Instead of that, he dug his nails into the shore, and with all his wits about him, sped for the desert. The greyhound was close behind him.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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