

THE INDIAN, THE LOON AND THE BEAR.

By C. C. Farr.

KISTAHBISH, Weenusk and Sheeno were excellent men, as far as Indians go, and as I was in great haste to reach a certain place within a given time, I was glad that I had been able to secure their services for the trip.

They never seemed to weary of the paddle, but kept up from daylight until dark, that rhythmic thud which canoe men know so well, and which in the light of business means so many miles a day.

They did not walk over the portages, but kept up that half run or jog trot which is peculiar to an Indian on the voyage, and which seems to ease them when heavily loaded. Lake after lake we traversed, camping late each day, but not in any discomfort, for they knew the exact spots most suitable for camping, and timed their arrival at each place with a punctuality that would have been a credit to a well-organized train system.

Such good time were we making that I felt easy regarding the object of my trip, which was to secure from an Indian a large quantity of furs, which he had in his possession, and, as I knew that others were also aware of the same fact, and that the usual custom was in such cases for the man who first caught the Indian to catch the furs, I was anxious to arrive at his camp before anyone else could do so, especially in that I had, in the previous fall, advanced this man heavily. Therefore I felt a sense of satisfaction and security of my purpose, as we sped along at the rate of about five miles an hour, and with only another half day's paddling before us.

The lake was beautifully calm, so that we could see reflected upon its surface the trees and bushes that fringed the shore line, like as in a mirror. Suddenly I became aware of an animated discussion going on amongst my Indians, and I at once gathered from it the fact that a loon was in sight—"mahnk," as they call it—and moreover, that they contemplated hunting it. No Indian can resist a loon hunt on a calm day. In fact, it is only on a calm day that they will attempt to get more than a chance shot at this inveterate diver, for the simple reason that unless they can see the tell-tale ripple or ring on the surface of the water, made by the loon when

it comes to the surface for air, it is hopeless trying to get more than a chance shot at it.

The loon seldom rises on the wing unless there is a breeze blowing. Some thought that it was impossible for them to do so, but last summer I saw a loon rise on a day that was perfectly calm, though it took a long time to clear the water. They never rise when chased, depending entirely on their wonderful diving powers to escape.

This loon hunting is a very violent kind of exercise. The loon dives, then every man strains every nerve at the paddle. The leader of the hunt watches the direction it apparently has taken when in the act of diving, judges his distance, and when he has come about as far as he thinks the loon can go, he sits, with gun to shoulder, on the alert, ready to take a snap shot the moment it rises to the surface, for it is no sooner up than it is down again, and while he (the leader) watches in front of him the eyes of the rest in the canoe are watching to right, to left, and behind for that tell-tale ripple that denotes that the loon has risen and gone down again.

I believe that it can see the canoe from beneath the surface of the water, and that unless it is very hard pressed, it can change its course beneath the surface.

The hunt lasts a long time, sometimes over an hour, the loon finally becoming so fagged that each dive becomes shorter and shorter, and then it is the business of the hunter to keep it diving as much as is possible, so that it can neither take breath nor rest, and finally the poor thing can no longer keep under water, and succumbs to the ever-pointing gun. I had so often witnessed these affairs that I did not care to waste the time now, but I found it hard to deny my fellows the fun, especially seeing the excellent time that they had made. So they hunted and they chased, and at last the final shot laid the poor beast fluttering on the surface of the water, but that last shot was answered by another report at no great distance from us, and I heard the Indians say "Mah!" "Oway-nin?" "Epeewidayetook!" "Listen!" "Who?" "Opposition trader perhaps."

At the same time a canoe, manned by three Indians, and containing a passenger, like myself, came swiftly round

a point. It was, indeed, the opposition trader and that blessed loon hunt had delayed us so that he had caught me up, while, to make matters worse, my men had pretty well spent themselves in hunting a loon, which is uneatable except by Indians, being both fishy and tough, while the skin is a straight white elephant. Some say they make excellent vests, but the only use I have ever seen them put to is to breed moths.

I expressed my opinion regarding the matter to my men, and they hung their heads and said nothing, but they paddled steadily. Of course, we met on the portages, and the two gangs of Indians fraternized. They showed their friends the loon with great pride, while I hated the very sight of it. My opposition friend was exceedingly urbane, and to judge by our conversation, one would have thought that we were out there paddling for the good of our health.

The loon hunt had certainly not helped my men, and I could plainly see that our chances of getting into the Indians' camp before my rival were becoming very thin. I occasionally resorted to the familiar "Hup, hup, hup!" but it was feebly responded to, and it was evident that we were losing ground. One does not consider a loon skin an adequate substitute for two or three hundred dollars worth of furs. To my intense disgust, Weenusk suddenly burst out laughing. I know Indians and their ways, and I know how cheerful they become under adversity, but I must confess that I found that laughter incongruous and unbearable.

"Kish Kolan! Agate Ki pisinahstishnah?"

I shouted, which means, "Shut up! Are you a fool?"

Weenusk did not answer, but he laughed the louder, and then he spoke rapidly, and under his breath, to the other Indians so that I only caught the word "Makwa" (bear), and I feared that they had caught sight of a bear swimming in the lake, which would mean another hunt, and consequent delay, but I said nothing. The other Indians laughed, and they quickened their stroke so as to leave the other canoe behind a few hundred yards. We were not far from another portage, and such was the speed they made that they were off, across the portage with the canoe and their loads before I had time to collect the few small personal belongings, which I always carried myself.

The other canoe came ashore before I got away, and as I knew the man well who was after those furs, I could not well refuse to answer him when he would speak to me, and there he kept me, chatting like a fool, until his men had their loads on their backs