

The Quest For Gander Lake

(By Robert Watson).

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Where is Gander Lake? Why!—take any little town and go along its main street as far as you can till you come to two roads, one running off to the left and the other branching away to the right. Don't take the road to the left if you would get to Gander Lake, because Gander Lake is in another direction. Follow to the right, and go on, and on, and on, over a hard country road, with high, barren-looking, purply-tinted hills above you, while away below you on that right hand of yours, the little town you have just come from lies quietly and snugly in the Valley, smoking cheerily in happy contentment.

Beyond the town you can see the blue waters of a lake. But that is not Gander Lake. Gander Lake lies farther afield, farther out of the beaten track than any common, ordinary, easily-found lake. Keep on in your quest, for it is worth while

After a bit, you will come to an old workman, who is cleaning out a drain-pipe which runs under the roadway. He is muddy, that workman—like his drain-pipe—and his nose has a cold-drip at the point of it. Not that it is so awfully cold, but his cold-drip is evidently chronic. The old fellow is ready to stop and talk, if you so have a mind, for his work can be done tomorrow or the next day or even the day after that. Of course, he may not be there now, but he was there at one time, and he seemed to be in no hurry. Anyway the drain-pipe is still there, working smoothly, a tribute and a monument to the man's thoroughness, if not to his speed.

Farther along—maybe a mile further—and a noise will smite your ears. In the distance you will see little animals running everywhere, varying in size from a puppy dog to a sheep. Can we be nearing Gander Lake, I wonder? No, evidently, not yet!

But surely that noise is a familiar one. It grows louder and still more loud. It is not a bleat, nor is it a bark. What kind of animals can these be anyway? They have a well-known gait. Some of them look dirty-white, some dirty-brown, some muddy-black. Why, of course! only one specie of animal has a tail like that.

But this is not Gander Lake. It is a piggery we have struck. It is feeding time too. How interesting! No wonder they grunt, and slither and snort, and clop. There they are, hundreds of them—three hundred the Chinaman says—big and lit-

tle, fat and lean, nozzling in the slough of mud and wheat in a long line of troughing; pushing and blowing, snapping at one another, and ever changing places in their endeavour to find a spot where there is more wheat more easily got at. How like they are to us humans in this respect! Always fighting and struggling to get where the wheat is thickest. But who of us thinks so? What a shocking idea, to be sure!

And the little baby-pigs would have no chance there at all, so they have been wisely penned off by themselves; there to learn all the dirty habits of their elders and to become proficient in the art of gobbling more than their fellows in a certain given time. Then—the inevitable end of pigs and humans—grist for the mill! grist for the mill!

But what of Gander Lake all this time. Surely it must be up that road that leads cloudward over the hill there and nestling on the other side.

The road is ending and the narrow paths begin, so we must perforce take to the paths if we would reach Gander Lake before sundown.

Snowflakes are beginning to fall. It is hazy around. The high tops of the hills are growing whiter. The horses on the range are moving, seeking the leeward side of the hills. How quiet and awesome nature in its wild state is! Here and there are lonely-looking clumps of trees, bare and skeleton-like. Over there the trees are more dense. Maybe a bear will wander out. Maybe not, for they have long been cuddled up for the winter. Maybe a mountain goat will bound away from the crags and rocks, as it scents our approach.

But where is Gander Lake? Can it be a myth?

We are far from the little country town and it gets dark very suddenly away up here. Quite easily one could be lost, and long might one wander about on these high ranges if such a fate should so befall. Gander Lake will have to wait till some other day, for we must retrace our steps before the dark comes down.

So it is down the hill and over the dale, and down the hill to the low-lands; on to the road, the beaten road, the road to the weal-or-woe-lands; but hearts are stout and limbs are strong; the game is worth the fight; the morning sun will gild the hills and chase the night with light.

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