



His Safeguard.

SOME years ago two boys, brothers, named Lockyer, established themselves in a singular business in Lake County, California; and an adventure befell one of them in connection with it, which is of so odd a character as to be worth notice from a naturalist's point of view, if from none other.

At the time of which I write, the Lockyer boys were under twenty years of age, Henry being the elder and Eastman the younger of the two. Like most young Westerners, both were keenly alive to any chance for making money and getting a start in the world; but not having good prospects at home they had started to go to Mendocino County for the purpose of working in a steam saw-mill, situated on a small river flowing down from the mountains to the Pacific. The exact distance which they had to go is not known to the writer, but it was considerable, through a mountainous tract of country, for the most part uninhabited; and either while going or returning, they passed through a very rocky valley, with a high range of peaks on either hand.

But it was not the geologic features of the valley which arrested the attention of the young explorers, but a reptilian feature, remarkable for its rarity on this coast, in the shape of a squirming, hissing mass of rattlesnakes. There were scores of them, all coiling over each other, upon a single ledge slope on the creek bank.

It certainly required an acute business eye to see anything pleasant or profitable in that unsightly and repulsive mass of venomous life, but Eastman Lockyer surveyed it with such an eye, having in mind a fact that within a few months he had learned and stored away in his memory. The fact was this: he had once seen an ounce of rattlesnake oil sold in a San Francisco shop for a dollar—a high price—by a druggist, by whom it is sold as a supposed remedy for deafness and rheumatism.

To his boyish intelligence, the large price seemed enormous, compared with the small amount of oil, and this was a sufficient inducement, for he had been told by the dealer from San Francisco that he would be glad to buy all that anybody would fetch him at seventy cents per ounce. From a rattlesnake's standpoint, it was an evil day when that fact entered the consciousness of Eastman Lockyer.

"We have struck it!" exclaimed his brother, as his eye wandered speculatively over the wriggling herd. "There's oil by the gallon there! And all the outfit we need is some tin cans to put it in."

They prospected the valley sufficiently to ascertain that a great many snakes bred and hibernated there. Then, with that unhesitating faith and enthusiasm in a new idea which is characteristic of young Americans of the Western type, they hurried to the nearest stage route, where they first communicated with the San Francisco dealer, and then secretly fitted out for a raid on the snakes.

Their method of operating was to steal upon a snake, and with a forked stick, pin the reptile to the ground till its head, or at least that part of

the jaw containing the poisonous fangs, could be severed with the hatchet. The reptile was then carried into camp, skinned, and hung up by a string to a horizontal pole resting in two crooked stakes. The warm May sun soon "tried" the carcass thus exposed; and to catch the oil as it dripped, a tin trough was set underneath.

The result of these two weeks' operations in May was fifteen quarts of oil, with which—a ten-quart can in each hand—Henry Lockyer walked to the nearest stage station. Not long after this the boys purchased a mule and pack-saddle, for transporting their stock in trade and provisions. A quart of oil at the rate they then received was worth nearly, or quite, sixteen dollars.

In July and August, too, during the so-called dog-days, the snakes were much abroad, and being blind at this season, from sloughing off their skins (including that of the eye), they were spiteful and venomous. Protected, however, by very thick boots, with tops reaching above the knees, the hunters stood in no great fear of their fangs, though they had several unpleasantly narrow escapes.

But later in the fall they were able to find but few snakes, for the reptiles remained in their coverets. Eastman now had recourse to a stratagem to call them from among the rocks, his device being what he called a "rattle-stick," consisting of the rattles of several huge snakes so fixed, or strung, on a bended stick that by springing the bow of the stick in his hand, the rattles would give forth that peculiar sound characteristic of the snake's tail when alive.

Provided with this novel counterfeit and his stick for pinning down the snakes, the young hunter would go cautiously about the moraines, till arriving at what he deemed a favorable place, he would begin "rattling," often with the result of luring a *bona fide* "rattler" to crawl forth and raise his head for a look around. A good many were thus secured, and contributed their fat to fill the insatiable cans of their enemies.

It was while out one day in September, with his "rattle-stick," that the adventure previously mentioned befell the young man. He was alone, Henry having started for the settlement that morning; Eastman had gone out to discover new "snakeries." He reached the summit of a range of hills shortly before noon, and proceeded along the crest of the ridge to the northward for a mile or more. Then he descended on the west side to a little pond which he saw, through the trees, a thousand feet or more below the summit crags, on the west side. The pond proved to be a most delightful little pool of cool water, lying on beds of pebbles and yellow gravel, fed by clear mountain springs.

Tired and rather hot from his long tramp, the young man lay down on a rock and drank of the cool water, then after resting awhile, ate his lunch and started to walk around the pond.

About half-way around it he came to a rick of redwood trunks, where three or four trees of large size had fallen partly into the water. Together these formed a barricade, seven or eight feet high. Jumping on the lowermost of the trunks, our explorer was about to vault upon the topmost lop, when, attracted by a sudden stir in the brush on the other side, he glanced down and saw a large, fierce-looking creature in the very act of springing at him.

It was a red panther, or "California lion," of the largest size, the first of its species that young Lockyer had ever seen. Confronted so suddenly by an animal of such ferocious aspect, he leaped backward off the logs and, stumbling, partly fell. At the same instant the panther jumped upon the logs, and with a growl crouched to spring upon him, before he had time even to regain his feet.

In his frantic scramble, Eastman instinctively raised his stick, and in so doing, by chance, "rattled" it. He says that the animal jumped just as the rattling noise was made, but that it seemed to "squirm round in the air" and landed to one side of him; and that on touching the ground, it bounded off for several yards and there crouched with its round yellow eyes fixed upon him, growling and switching its tail.

Alarmed as he was, the young man had sense to realize that it was the sound of the snakes' rattles that had deterred the animal from pouncing upon him. He rattled again; and at every sound of the rattles, he asserts that the panther would quiver as if greatly excited, making a kind of whining noise. Evidently the dread inspired by the rattlesnake's note of warning had its responsive chord in the instinct of the creature.

Lockyer now began creeping away, backwards, rattling as he moved, and the beast showing no disposition to follow him, he was able to get away and make good his escape.

After the return of his brother Henry, two days later they went over to the pond together, taking a rifle belonging to the latter, and on approaching the redwood rick, discovered the same panther, as Eastman thinks, lying on one of the logs.

Henry fired and shot it; and feeling some curiosity as to the reason of the animal's remaining so long in the same locality, they now examined the rick to ascertain whether there was a den or lair, about it. No den was discovered, but they at length came upon a little wee panther cub hid away in some brush. The tiny creature spit, growled and snapped its teeth, defying all prudent attempts to secure it—till knocked on the head.

