

THE CLAIM AND THE CARIBOU.

By W. F. B.

IT so happened that the greed for gold had seized my troubled mind. I had been in Kootenay for a few months and had been dabbling in the toils of the law on behalf of a prospector named Alec. — (I forget the rest of his name.)

Alec's banking account amounted to a few nickels; mine was a larger figure — on the debit side! Alec had a claim, a veritable bonanza, situated near the "divide" of some far-distant lofty and high mountain. He generously bestowed a half interest of this claim on me, giving me the privilege of paying the recording fees for the same.

I was but a tenderfoot, and a claim then represented to me untold gold. I imagined that I would have little difficulty in finding some wealthy speculator, or, more probably, a speculator in someone else's wealth, who would at once buy up the claim for a sum sufficiently large to repay me well for my legal labors and feel a fair balance in my pocket in addition thereto.

Alec gave me several chunks of quartz in which specks of gold could be seen, with the aid of a powerful glass. These I displayed with proper pride, qualified with the statement — taken on Alec's word of honor — that they had been picked off at random from the ledge. Strange to say, the bloated capitalists did not jump at my proposition, for I was not alone in the field; in fact, every one I met had a claim or claims of fabulous value to dispose of. Time wore on, and a year had almost elapsed since the claim had been staked, when Alec informed me that it was necessary for us to do \$100 worth of work on the claim.

Bless me! I never had \$100 in my life to spare!

Alec was equal to the occasion, however. He had two friends who, for a quarter interest in the claim, would help him to do the necessary work. I could hold on to my half share, provided I furnished the necessary supplies, tools and travelling expenses for the expedition. He further suggested that I should accompany them and act as chief hewer of wood and drawer of water, and so enable them to get through the work in as short a time as possible. He also told me that there were plenty of deer on the mountain, and also a band of caribou. The first

part of the programme hardly suited my tastes, though certainly there was an air of novelty surrounding it; but I dearly desired to slay a caribou.

Again came the unpleasant question of finance; but it chanced that a certain misguided magazine editor had been sufficiently ill-advised to accept an article of mine, and had moreover paid me fairly well for the same.

I thereupon resolved to sink the reward of my literary achievement in the claim, and then and there purchased the necessary provender and tools for the great work.

We borrowed blankets and a tent, which, with the food and a .45.90 Winchester rifle, completed our outfit, and one fine morning we started from the city wharf of Nelson, B.C., in a large four-oared tub of a boat, for a point some ten miles up Kootenay Lake, where we were to disembark and begin our journey up the mountain.

A stiff breeze was blowing, so we hoisted a nondescript sail, which belonged to the boat, and which, owing to our ignorance of sailing, nearly brought us to a watery grave. However, we managed to run the boat ashore when half full of water, and escaped with a ducking.

Then the storm wind rose and rain fell in torrents, so we unloaded our cargo and sought shelter in a deserted log cabin by the lake side. I forgot to mention a humble, though much loved companion, I had brought with me, namely, Buz, a wire haired fox terrier who had followed my fortunes from England, and who hardly ever left my side. Buz helped to enliven our stay in the log cabin by killing two enormous bush-tail rats which had taken up their abode there.

In the afternoon the elements were more propitious, and we continued our voyage, making our destination, though, too late to commence the ascent of the mountain that day.

One of my companions was a great angler, so he and I went a-fishing and managed to secure about a dozen fair-sized trout, which came in handy for our evening meal. We camped that night in a "shack" belonging to a ranch hard by. The said shack had been recently tenanted by a party of prospectors, who had left behind them lively reminiscences of their visit in the shape of — well, never mind. Suffice to say

that my slumber was so greatly disturbed by the depredations of those "pilgrims of the night" that I preferred to make my bed under the stars.

We rose with the sun. I sneaked time enough for a plunge in the lake and a few casts over the trout, getting one or two small fish, which added to the breakfast table.

We hired a species of quadruped known in Kootenay as a cayuse—a diminutive apology for a horse—from the rancher, loaded the sorry animal with our packs, and, with hearts inflamed with the joint desire of gold and game, managed to make a start before the sun was yet high in the heavens.

The first three miles of our journey were fairly easy to travel. The route was up a canyon, down which a merry little creek tumbled and thrashed itself into foam. There was a moderately good horse trail, which we followed, and by 8 a.m. we had reached the first stage of our journey. We made some tea, and after a short rest, reluctantly left the horse trail and followed a steep narrow apology for a trail which turned to the right and lead in corkscrew fashion to the "divide," i.e., the summit of the mountain. And now began trouble. The ascent was steep, in places almost perpendicular. It was all we could do, what with pulling and shoving, to get the cayuse up some parts of the way. Then we came to a tiny creek with a bright, treacherous looking patch of green moss beside it, into which the cayuse floundered and fell, finally rolling over and dumping our packs into the rich, black liquid mud. It took us some time to extricate the poor beast, and we were dismayed at the state of our blankets. However, there was nothing for it but to push along, so on we scrambled as best we could, determined to push the cayuse up somehow or other, the only alternative being that we should transform ourselves into beasts of burden, and allow the animal to find its own way home.

Our next difficulty was a forest fire. We had seen with dread the cloud of smoke in front of us, and fondly hoped the trail would skirt the fire zone. Alas! It inconveniently winded right into the burning timber. The fire had been lit some time ago, and we had only come in for the tail end of it. Still, it was unpleasant enough, what with the heat and blinding smoke, nor was an element of danger wanting, as we speedily noticed when a gigantic fir tree toppled down uncomfortably near us. Then for about an hour we had to cut a way with our axes through the fallen timber and charred tree stumps.

I am ashamed to own that I was half