

Our Young Folks.

CANOE AND RIFLE ON THE ORINOCO.

IN FIVE CHAPTERS.—CHAP. II.

A DANGEROUS EXPERIMENT

David here did a very foolish and dangerous thing. He dropped his rifle ran forward like the wind, straight toward the wounded crocodile, and stooped to seize it by the tail. But with surprising quickness the burly monster wheeled around, raised himself high on his fore legs, flung his terrible jaws wide open within a foot of David's face, and brought them together.

"You, Davie! Come away from there!" shouted Ben, terrified at the other's position.

David dodged back, thoroughly scared at the sudden turn of affairs, and sprang round to the end of the huge tail.

"Bring my rifle, quick!" he shouted.

"Come away from that, I tell you!" yelled Ben, running forward, tugging desperately at the empty shell which had stuck fast in his rifle.

Again the crocodile wheeled around, facing his unarmed assailant, raised himself defiantly as before, and uttered a deeply guttural snarl of rage.

"Bring my rifle, why don't you?" shouted the boy, in desperation, as he again ran round to the tail.

"Shut your mouth and come away from there!" angrily commanded his comrade, who was by this time close at hand and shoving in a fresh cartridge. The crocodile whirled around, but again David sprang nimbly out of his reach. An instant later Ben's rifle was at his shoulder, and a bullet went crashing into one of the neck vertebrae of the dangerous reptile, and ended its career.

"Another!" said David, with a white face. Another shot was fired. Five minutes later he was stone dead.

"Look here, youngster!" said Ben, severely. "You don't want to do the like of that again, do you hear? What are you thinking about, anyhow?"

"Well, you see, I was afraid he would go back into the water; and I wanted to—keep him busy and keep his mind off the water until you could come up and kill him. You know we might have lost him but for that!" said David.

"Humph! You intended to catch him by the tail and hold him, that's what you thought about. Why, you could have held a train of cars as easily as you could him, lively as he was! I thought he was going to grab you up and run into the water with you!" said Ben, seriously.

"Oh no!" said the other, airily. "He only wanted to show me what a fine set of teeth he had. But isn't he an old monster, though?"

This crocodile measured thirteen feet five inches, and his weight could not have been less than seven hundred pounds. With infinite labor the hunters removed the thick hide of the tough old saurian, carried it all the way across that wide at-bank to the canoe, and at nightfall paddled back to the camp, thoroughly wearied with their long day's work.

By the end of their first week out they had killed two more fine crocodiles, one ten feet in length, and the other ten feet seven inches. Of these two specimens they preserved the skeletons entire.

The fact that they were hunting with a definite purpose, and that the success of their trip depended upon their skill with their rifles, added an element of interest to their work which it could not have possessed otherwise. They toiled as earnestly for "specimens" as they ever did at home in the field or shop, and their enjoyment of the life they led was both intense and wholesome.

An old Indian turtle catcher occasionally visited the lagoon in his little *couriyara*; and the crocodile-hunters soon made friends with him.

His method of catching turtles called for an artilleryman's judgment and a billiard-player's skill; to the two Americans it was really wonderful.

His weapons were a bow and arrows, the latter made of light reeds with a small iron pin fitting into a socket in the end of the shaft, and tied fast to it by a small, stout cord. The turtle-catcher's mode of attack was to sit quietly in his canoe in the middle of the lagoon, and watch for the turtles to come to the surface to breathe. They seldom showed themselves nearer to his canoe than fifty yards, usually at a good deal more than that distance.

When a turtle came up within range and floated quietly at the surface for a few moments, the old fellow would carefully measure the distance with his eye, take aim and shoot an arrow high in the air, so that it would describe a parabolic curve and fall perpendicularly upon the turtle's back. If the point pierced the shell, it would sink and come out of the reed, which would float on the water, and being attached to the pin, it would keep the turtle from sinking until it could be secured. It was like mortar-firing, only more difficult. Very often the old man missed his aim; but he was sufficiently successful in his captures to be able to make a living by them. David bought two fine turtles of him at a fair price, which were preserved for mounting.

On the eighth day of their stay on the island both the hunters started out on what was to be their last shooting excursion before proceeding down the river. They paddled across the lagoon, landed and separated. Ben went towards the head of the lagoon, while David set out to visit the sand-bars at the mouth.

IN THE QUICKSANDS.

Close to where the lagoon opened into the river, there lay a low, level sand-bank of about two acres in extent, which rose but three or four inches above the surface of the water. David found two cormorants sitting at its farther edge, one of which he promptly knocked over with a rifle bullet, then started to secure it. As he ran forward, he noticed that the sand-bank which he had to cross was wet and newly formed, but it was firm and hard; without pausing, he ran on and was within twenty feet of where it lay, at the water's edge, when suddenly, without an instant's warning, the ground dissolved beneath his feet and he sank knee-deep in sand and water.

"Ha! quicksand!" he thought, and wheeled about to step on firm ground; but to his horror he found that the very ground he had just crossed securely was changed to quicksand. He struggled forward for half a dozen paces or more, sinking to his knees at every step, but with each step hoping to gain firm footing.

Vain hope. He sank so deeply that he was soon exhausted and compelled to pause for breath. It flashed across his mind, too, that he might be swallowed up here and leave not even a sign of his fate. The yielding sand was half-way up his thigh already. He pitched his rifle as far as he could towards the shore, and sent his hat sailing after it, so that if he disappeared, they would tell the story; all this in less than ten seconds. Then he shouted, "Help!" but his voice was lost in the dead silence which surrounded him like a sea. He snatched his revolver from its case and fired three shots in quick succession as a signal of distress to Ben. Thank heaven, he was in sight, on the shore, but nearly a mile away, and he realized that his faithful friend, who would save him or die in the attempt were he only there, could not possibly arrive in time to help him.

With men who are cool and collected in the face of deadly peril, the mind acts like flashes of lightning, illuminating all their surroundings. David vividly remembered having read that the more an animal struggles in quicksand, the faster it sinks; but he saw it would be folly to give over all effort to save himself, and made one more fierce struggle to reach firm ground. But in doing so, he lost his balance, fell forward, and his arms sank to the elbow. By a powerful effort he recovered himself; the great drops of cold perspiration trickled from his forehead; and with a choking sensation the bitter thought came to him that it was hard luck to die in that miserable way.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

What the Birds Say.

BY MARY A. BARR.

Out from the tree-tops a voice called out, "Who, who, who, who's there?" or, at least, so it sounded. Immediately the singing stopped, and one of the negroes answered, "Some folks from de Norf, Massa Owl, an' Cap'n Jo'nsin, an' me, an' Homer, an' Virgil, an' Pete," read Grandpa to the little gathering of boys and girls who came every week to the old plantation to hear him read from some story book or paper, and to eat some of grandmamma's cake and molasses candy. But "Massa Owl" is not the only bird that can speak English, and now that spring is here and summer coming, the children who read this may hear for themselves lots of pretty sayings from their little feathered friends, the birds, if they will but listen. I think from the number of boys and girls who write about their birds, there must be many who have discovered that their pets can talk (or seem to talk), and if they try to understand them, it will not only be a great pleasure to themselves, but the means of taming many a shy bird.

Of course you have all heard about the cuckoo lady whip-poor-will, and that jolly brown bird which sings:—

"Bob White,
Pease ripe;
Coming there
To-morrow night."

and the mocking-bird, which, the Mexicans say, speaks four hundred different languages, although his English, while he lives in the woods, is confined to three rather ugly words, which are "aha'n't," "can't," and "dare"; but the hawk is almost, if not quite, as rude as the mocking-bird, for, no matter how much right you may have to be on the river or in the woods, he is always saying:—

"It's queer, queer, queer,
That you are
Here, here, here."

The redbird is one of the most hospitable in his greeting, for it is "Cheer, more cheer"; and if any of you live near a marsh and will call upon Madam Marsh Wren, she will tell you, "I am so happy, I am so happy, I am so happy," while the Carolina wren will bid you "Cheer up, and come to me, come to me, come to me"; and by-and-by, when it gets to be quite warm, a dear little bird, with the very ugly name of Loggerhead, will sit close beside his wee wife on the wild-rose hedge, and say to her, "So sweet so sweet"; and some warm morning, when you are on your way to school through the fields, the funny old gray fly-catcher will hop on the ground before you and call out, "I kill you, I kill you, I kill you early in the morning"—of course it is all a joke, for I don't believe he would, even if he could, for he is such a jolly bird. Then there's Joe, poor Joe; he is not poor at all, or he lives in the most beautiful house, made of tall reeds and grasses, and trimmed with flowers, and eats the fattest little frogs and fish, and yet every night, and early in the morning just at sunrise, he will call out, "Poor Joe, poor, poor Joe," in the most mournful voice.

I have a little English cousin who declares that her thrush can say, "Jane, Jane, a little game, a little game, a little game, please please, sweet Jenny, sweet Jenny." You may hear in the spring the warbling fly-catcher, who, although not quite so vicious in his remarks as the Southern gray fly-catcher, is very soldierly both in appearance and song, for he says, as plain as can be, "Brig-a-dier, brig-a-dier, brigade," and the Massachusetts Peabody bird will tell you that he is "all day whittling, whittling, whittling," while just at sundown you will hear the green warbler singing, "Hear me, St. The-ros-a"—and the queer little red navis, who fits about the field while the farmer is sowing corn, will tell him to "Drop it, drop it, cover it up, pull it up, pull it up, pull it up."

The oven-bird of Massachusetts, who sings only at noon on a bright day, and the Maryland yellow-throat, will both declare that they are watching you, although they use different words to tell you so; the Massachusetts bird says, "I see, I see, I see, I

see," while his little Southern cousin sings, "I see, I see you, I see, I see you, I see, I see you."

Of course there are people who do not care for birds who will think it all nonsense to say that they can talk, but I am sure that there are boys and girls who love birds, and who study their ways and songs, that are equally sure that their pets can speak, and speak very plainly to them at least.—*Harper's Young People.*

Oh! Those Wasps.

BY EDWARD G. RAND.

Screaming, running, tossing up their arms, Patty and Poppy and Fan and Margery Ann came into grandma's kitchen one day. Into a nest of "queer black and yellow flies," as she said, Patty poked her dainty foot when out in the field one day.

How the "flies" did chase them!

"Oh, Katy, they're killing us, the flies!" shrieked Margery Ann at the kitchen door.

"The flies!" said Katy, drawing her stout, red armband of a washtub. "They're wasps, and they are chasing ye, the mane craters! Out wid ye!" shouted Katy to the invaders.

Through the kitchen, into the dining-room, across it, along the hall and up-stairs to grandma dear raced the screaming children, the wasps in hot pursuit.

"Oh, grandma!" cried Poppy, "they're killing us!"

"Why children, what is the matter?" said grandma, whose peaceful face and white cap had just been banding over the family Bible and its picture of Jacob and those angels on the ladder, like morning-glories on a vine. "Sit down on the lounge and tell me what the matter is. Wasps, if I ever!"

Didn't grandma spring then?

"Oh, here comes Katy!" she said.

"Yes," cried Katy, swinging a broom in one hand, shaking a mop in the other, her eyes flashing like an express-locomotive's light, "I'm jist a goin' for 'em. I broom 'em and then I mop 'em up and equeeze 'em. Five quite dead in the kitchen. And here's bad luck to 'em up here!"

While Katy was driving like a tornado among the angry wasps, slaying in every direction, grandma was soothing the bitten arms and legs. There they were on the lounge in a row, eight bare little arms, and eight bare little legs also, for the wasps had put their needles through the children's stockings. Did they mean to darn any holes there?

When Major-General Katy had killed all the enemy with charges of broom and mop, grandma asked for an account of the accident. Then she said: "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Let's put them in a pail of hot water," said Poppy.

"Pail of hot water! No; drown 'em in the freezing, freezing ocean," said Patty, shaking her head.

"No, let's go up just as easy as can be and pull their stingers out," said Margery Ann, who belonged to a band of mercy, and did not want to kill them.

"No; I'll tell you," exclaimed grandma, and she looked wise as Moses in the Old Testament. "I wouldn't go near them. That is the best way for children to treat wasps, and a good many other things in this world. Don't go near them, and then you will never have trouble. I'll get Patrick to go out some day with a lot of sulphur, a bunch of hay and some matches, and he will take care of them. The best way for you to manage wasps is to keep away from them."

Patty and Poppy and Fan and Margery thought it was queer advice to such old children as they were. As they all lived in the city, and did not know much about the dangers of the country fields, grandma continued to look more and more like the wise Moses. They thought they would not again go near those 'queer black and yellow flies."

It is little the sign of a wise or a good man to suffer temperance to be transgressed in order to purchase the repute of a generous entertainer.

Sorrow itself is not so hard to bear as the thought of sorrow coming. Airy ghosts that work no harm do terrify us more than men in steel with bloody purposes.