

The Chore-boy of Camp Kippewa.

A Canadian Story.

BY J. MACDONALD OXLEY.

CHAPTER IX.

OUT OF CLOUDS, SUNSHINE.

GREAT was the joy of the men at finding Johnston alive and still able to speak, and at once their united strength was applied to extricating him from his painful position. The poor horse, utterly unable to help himself, had long ago given up the vain struggle, and, in a state of pitiful exhaustion and fright, was lying where he first fell, the snow all about him being torn up in a way that showed how furious had been his struggles. Johnston had, by dint of heroic exertion, managed to withdraw his leg a little from underneath the heavy jumper, but he could not free himself altogether, so that had the wolves found out how completely both horse and man were in their power, they would have made short work of both. Fortunately, by vigorous shouting and wild waving of his arms, the foreman had been able to keep the cowardly creatures at bay long enough to allow the rescuing party to reach him. But he could not have kept up many minutes more, and if strength and voice had entirely forsaken him the dreadful end would soon have followed.

Handling the injured man with a tenderness and care one would hardly have looked for in such rough fellows, the lumbermen after no small exertion got him up out of the Gully and laid him upon the sleigh in the road. Then the horse was released from the jumper, and, being coaxed to his feet, led down the Gully to where the sides were not so steep and he could scramble up, while the jumper itself was left behind to be recovered when they had more time to spare.

Before they started off for the shanty one of the men had the curiosity to cross the Gully and examine the bridge where it broke, in order to find out the cause of the accident. When he returned there was a strange expression on his face, which added to the curiosity of the others who were awaiting his report.

"Both stringers are sawed near through!" he exclaimed. "And it's not been done long either. Must have been done to-day, for the sawdust's lying around still."

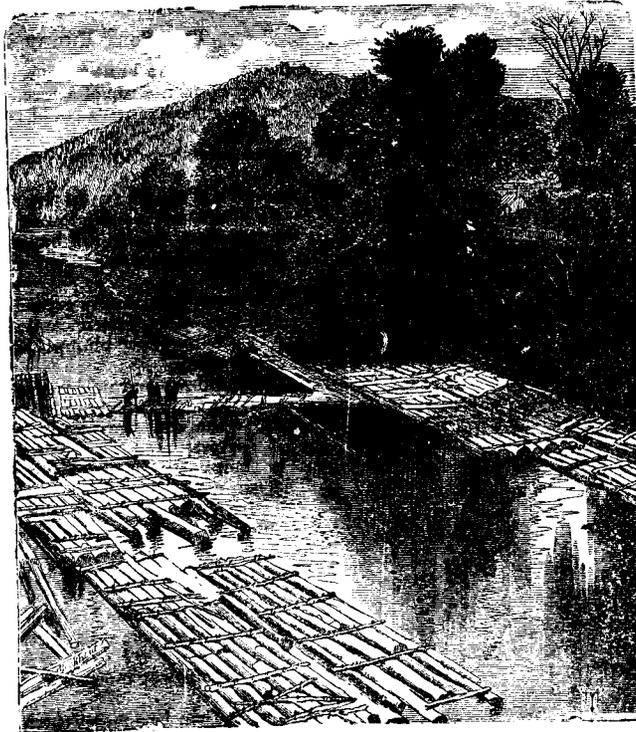
The men looked at one another in amazement and horror. The stringers sawed through! What scoundrel could have done such a thing? Who was the murderous traitor in their camp? Then to the quickest-witted of them came the thought of Damase's dire threat and consuming jealousy.

"I know who did it," he cried. "There's only one man in the camp villain enough to do it. It was that hound, Damase, as sure as I stand here!"

Instantly the others saw the matter in the same light. Damase had done it beyond a doubt, hoping thereby to have the revenge for which his savage heart thirsted. Ill would it have gone with him could the men have laid hands on him at that moment. They were just in the mood to have inflicted such punishment as would probably have put the wretch in a worse plight than his intended victim, and many and fervent were their vows of vengeance, expressed in language rather the reverse of polite. Strict almost to severity as Johnston was in his management of the camp, the majority of the men, including all the best elements, regarded him with deep respect, if not affection; and that Damase Deschenaux should make so dastardly an attempt upon his life aroused in them a storm of indignant wrath which would not soon be allayed.

They succeeded in making the sufferer quite comfortable upon the sleigh, but they had to go very slowly on the return journey to the shanty, both to make it easy for Johnston and because the men had to walk, now that the sleigh was occupied. So soon as they came in sight, Frank ran to meet them, calling out, eagerly:

"Is he all right? Have you got him?"



RAFTING ON THE MATTAWA.

"We've got him, Frank, safe enough," replied the driver of the sleigh. "But we wasn't a minute too soon, I can tell you. I guess you must have sent your wolves off to him when you'd done with them."

"Were the wolves at you, sir?" exclaimed Frank, bending over the foreman, and looking anxiously into his face.

Johnston had fallen into a sort of doze or stupor, but the stopping of the sleigh and Frank's anxious voice aroused him, and he opened his eyes with a smile that told plainly how dear to him the boy had become.

"They weren't quite at me, Frank, but they soon would have been if the men hadn't come along," he replied.

With exceeding tenderness, the big helpless man was lifted from the sleigh and placed in his own bunk in the corner. The whole shanty was awake to receive him, a glorious fire roared and crackled upon the hearth, and the pleasant fragrance of fresh brewed tea filled the room. So soon as the foreman's outer garments had been removed, Frank brought him a pannikin of the lumberman's pet beverage, and he drank it eagerly, saying that it was all the medicine he needed. Beyond making him as comfortable as possible, nothing further could be done for him, and in a little while the shantymen were all asleep again as soundly as though there had been no disturbance of their slumbers. Frank wanted to sit up with Johnston, but the foreman would not hear of it, and, anyway, thoroughly sincere as was his offer, he never could have carried it out, for he was very weary himself and ready to drop asleep at the first chance.

Of Damase there was no sign. Some of the men had noticed him quitting work earlier than usual in the afternoon, and when he did not appear at supper time had thought he was gone off hunting, which he loved to do whenever he got the opportunity. Whether or not he would have the assurance to return to the shanty would depend upon whether he had waited in ambush to see the result of his villainy, for if he had done so, and had witnessed the at least partial failure of his plot, there was little chance of his being seen again.

The next morning a careful examination of Johnston showed that, while no bones were broken, his right leg had been very badly twisted and strained, almost to dislocation, and he had been internally injured to an extent that could be determined only by a doctor. It was decided to send a message for the nearest doctor, and meanwhile to do everything possible for the sufferer in the way of bandages and liniments that the simple shanty outfit afforded. By general understanding, Frank assumed the duties of nurse, and it was not long before life at the camp settled down in its accustomed routine, Johnston having appointed the

most experienced and reliable of the gang its foreman during his confinement. In due time the doctor came, examined his patient, made everybody glad by announcing that none of the injuries were serious, and that they required only time and attention for their cure, wrote out full directions for Frank to follow, and then, congratulating Johnston upon his good fortune in having so devoted and intelligent a nurse, set off again on the long drive to his distant home with the pleasant consciousness of having done his duty and earned a good fee.

The weeks that followed were the happiest Frank spent that winter. His duties as nurse were not onerous, and he enjoyed very much the importance with which they invested him. So long as his patient was well looked after, he was free to come and go according to his inclinations, and the thoughtful foreman saw to it that he spent at least half the day in the open air, often sending him with messages to the men working far off in the woods. Frank always carried his rifle with him on these tramps, and frequently brought back with him a brace of hares or partridges, which, having had the benefit of Baptiste's skill, were greatly relished by Johnston, who found his appetite for the plain fare of the shanty much dulled by his confinement.

As the days slipped by, the foreman began to open his heart to his young companion and to tell him much about his boyhood, which deeply interested Frank. Living a frontier life, he had his full share of adventure in hunting, lumbering, and prospecting for limits, and many an hour was spent reviewing the past. One evening while they were thus talking together Johnston became silent and fell into a sort of reverie, from which he presently roused himself, and, looking very earnestly into Frank's face, asked him:

"Have you always been a Christian, Frank?"

The question came so unexpectedly and was so direct, that Frank was quite taken aback, and, being slow to answer, the foreman, as if he had been too abrupt, went on to say:

"The reason I asked you was because you seem to enjoy so much reading your Bible and saying your prayers that I thought you must have had those good habits a long time."

Frank had now fully recovered himself, and with a blush that greatly became him, answered modestly:

"I have always loved God. Mother taught me how good and kind he is as soon as I was old enough to understand, and the older I get the more I want to love him and to try to do what is right."

A look of ineffable tenderness came into Johnston's dark eyes while the boy was speaking. Then his face darkened, and, giving vent to a heavy sigh, he passed his hand over his eyes as though to put away

some painful recollection. After a moment's silence, he said:

"My mother loved her Bible and wanted me to love it too. But I was a wild, headstrong chap, and didn't take kindly to the notion of being religious, and I'm afraid I cost her many a tear. God bless her! I wonder does she ever up there think of her son down here, and wonder if he's any better than he was when she had to leave him to look after himself."

Not knowing just what to say, Frank made no reply, but his face glowed with sympathetic interest, and after another pause the foreman went on:

"I've been thinking a great deal lately, Frank, and it's been all your doing. Seeing you so particular about your religion, and not letting anything stop you from saying your prayers and reading your Bible just as you would at home, has made me feel dreadfully ashamed of myself, and I've been wanting to have a talk with you about it. Would you mind reading your Bible to me? I haven't been inside a church for many a year, and I guess I'd be none the worse of a little Bible-reading."

Frank could not restrain an exclamation of delight. Would he mind? Had not this very thing been on his conscience for weeks past! Had he not been hoping and praying for a good opportunity to propose it himself, and only kept back because of his fear lest the foreman should think this offer presumptuous?

"I shall be very glad indeed to read my Bible to you, sir," he answered, eagerly. "I've been wanting to ask if I mightn't do it, but was afraid that perhaps you would not like it."

"Well, Frank, to be honest with you, I'd a good deal rather have you read to me than read it for myself," said Johnston; "because you must know it 'most by heart, and I've forgotten what little I did know once."

The reading began that night, and thenceforward was never missed while the two were at Camp Kippewa. Young as Frank was, he had learned from his parents and at Sunday-school a great deal about the Book of books, and especially about the life of Christ, so that to Johnston he seemed almost a marvel of knowledge. It was beautiful to see the big man's simplicity as he sat at the feet, so to speak, of a mere boy, and learned anew from him the sublime and precious gospel truths that the indifference and neglect of more than forty years had buried in dim obscurity; and Frank found an ever-increasing pleasure in repeating the comments and explanations that he had heard from the dear lips at home. Even to his young eyes it was clear that the foreman was thoroughly in earnest, and would not stop short of a full surrender of himself to the Master, he had so long refused to acknowledge. Above all things, he was a thorough man, and therefore this would take time, for he would insist upon knowing every step of the way; but once well started, no power on earth or beneath would be permitted to bar his progress to the very end.

And this great end was achieved before he left his bunk to resume his work. He lay down there bruised and crippled and godless; but he arose healed and strengthened and a new man in Christ Jesus! If Frank was proud of his big convert, who can blame him? But for his coming to the camp, Johnston might have remained as he was, caring for none of those things which touched his eternal interests; but now through the influence of his example, aided by favouring circumstances, he had been led to the Master's feet.

But Damase—what of Damase? There is not much to tell. Whether or not he was watching when the bridge fell, and how he spent that night, no one ever knew. The next morning he was seen at the depot, where he explained his presence by saying that the foreman had "bounced" him, and that he was going back to his native town. Beyond this, nothing further was ever heard of him.

(To be continued.)

Daube: "Now Miss Hunter, please look pleasant—that's it—keep that for a moment until I can catch it. There. Now you may resume your natural expression if you wish."