

Glengarry School Days.

A STORY OF EARLY DAYS IN GLENGARRY.

By Ralph Connor—Rev. C. W. Gordon.

CHAPTER X.—Continued.

"He's making for the Big Swamp," said Don, and on they went, with eyes and ears on the alert, expecting every moment to hear the snort of a bear, or to meet him on the further side of every bunch of underbrush.

For an hour they went on at a steady trot, over and under fallen logs, splashing through water holes, crashing over dead brushwood, and tearing through the interlacing boughs of the thick underbrush of spruce and balsam. The black dogs never hesitated. They knew well what was their business there, and that they kept strictly in mind. Fido, on the other hand, who loved to roam the woods in an aimless hunt for any and every wild thing that might cross his nose, but who had never seriously hunted anything in particular, trotted good-naturedly behind Hughie, with rather a bored expression on his face.

The trail, which had led them steadily north, all at once turned west, and away from the swamp.

"Say," said Don, "he's making for Alan Gorrach's cabin."

"Man!" said Hughie, "that would be fine, to get him there. It's good and open, too."

"Too open by a long way," grunted Don. "We'd never get him there."

Sure enough, the dogs led up from the swamp and along the path to Alan's cabin. The door stood open, and in answer to Don's "Horo!" Alan came out.

"What now?" he said, glowering at Don.

"You won't be wanting any dogs to-day, Alan?" said Don, politely.

Alan glanced at him suspiciously, but said not a word.

"These are very good dogs, indeed, Alan."

"Go on your ways, now," said Alan.

"These black ones are not in very good condition, but Fido there is a good, fat dog."

Alan's wrath began to rise. "Will you be going on, now, about your business?"

"Better take them, Alan, there's a hard winter coming on."

"Mac an' Diabhoil!" cried Alan, in a shrill voice, suddenly bursting into fury. "I will be having your heart's blood," he cried, rushing into his cabin.

"Come on, Hughie," cried Don, and away they rushed, following the black dogs upon the trail of the bear.

Deeper and deeper into the swamp the dogs led the way, the going becoming more difficult and the underbrush thicker at every step. After an hour or two of hard work, the dogs began to falter, and ran hither and thither, now on one scent and then on another, till, tired out and disgusted, Don held them in, and threw himself down upon the soft moss that lay deep over everything.

"We're on his old tracks here," said Don, savagely, "and you can't pick out the new from the old."

"His hole must be somewhere not too far away," said Hughie.

"Yes, perhaps it is, but then, again, it may be across the ridge. At any rate, we'll have some grub."

As they ate the bannocks and cheese, they pictured to themselves what they should do if they ever should come up with the bear.

"One thing we've got to be careful of," said Don, "and that is, not to lose our heads."

"That's so," assented Hughie, feeling quite cool and self-possessed at the time.

"Because if you lose your head you're done for," continued Don. "Remember Ken McGregor?"

"No," said Hughie.

Didn't you ever hear that? Why he ran into a bear, and made a drive at him with his axe, but the bear, with one paw knocked the axe clear out of his hand, and with one sweep of the other tore his insides right out. They're mighty cute, too," went on Don. "They'll pretend to be almost dead just to coax you near enough, and then they'll spin round on their hind legs like a

rooster. If they ever do catch you, the only thing to do is to lie still and make believe you're dead, and then, unless they're very hungry, they won't hurt you much."

After half an hour's rest, the hunting instinct awoke within them, and the boys determined to make another attempt. After circling about the swamp for some time, the boys came upon a beaten track which led straight through the heart of the swamp.

"I say," said Don, "this is going to strike the ridge somewhere just about there," pointing north-east, "and if we don't see anything between here and the ridge, we'll strike home that way. It'll be better walking than this cursed swamp, anyway. Are you tired?"

Hughie refused to acknowledge any weariness.

"Well, then, I am," said Don.

The trail was clear enough, and they were able to follow at a good pace, so that in a few minutes, as they had expected, they struck the north-east end of the swamp. Here again they called a halt, and tying up the dogs, lay down upon the dry brown leaves, lazily eating the beechnuts and discussing their prospects of meeting the bear, and their plans for dealing with him.

"Well, let's go on," at length said Don. "There's just a chance of our meeting him on this ridge. He's got a den somewhere down in the swamp, and he may be coming home this way. Besides, it'll take us all our time, now, to get home before dark."

"I guess there's no use keeping the dogs any longer. We'll just let them go."

So saying, Don let the black dogs go free, but after a little skirmishing through the open beech woods, the dogs appeared to lose all interest in the expedition, and kept close to Don's heels.

Fido, on the other hand, followed, ranging the woods on either side, cheerfully interested in scaring up rabbits, ground-hogs and squirrels. He had never known the rapture of bringing down big game, and so was content with whatever came his way.

At length the hunters reached the main trail, where their paths separated; but a little of the swamp still remained, and on the other side was the open clearing.

"This is your best way," said Don, pointing out the path to Hughie.

"We had bad luck to-day, but we'll try again. We may meet him still, you know, so don't fire at any squirrel or anything. If I hear a shot I'll come to you, and you do the same by me."

"I say," said Hughie, "where does this track of mine come out? Is it below the Deepole there, or is it on the other side of the clearing?"

"Why, don't you know?" said Don. "This runs right up to the back of Fisher's berry patch, and through the sugar-bush to your own clearing. I'll go with you if you like."

"Oh, pshaw!" said Hughie. "I'll find it all right. Come on, Fido." But Fido had disappeared. "Good night, Don."

"Good night," said Don. "Mind you don't fire unless it's at a bear. I'll do the same."

In a few minutes Hughie found himself alone in the thick underbrush of the swamp. The shadows were lying heavy, and the sunlight that still caught the tops of the tall trees was quite lost in the gloom of the low underbrush. Deep moss under foot, with fallen trees and thick-growing balsam and cedars, made the walking difficult, and every step Hughie wished himself out in the clearing. He began to feel, too, the oppression of the falling darkness. He tried whistling to keep up his courage, but the sound seemed to fill the whole woods about him, and he soon gave it up.

After a few minutes he stood still and called for Fido, but the dog had gone on some hunt of his own, and with a sense of deeper loneliness he set himself again to his struggle with the moss and brush and fallen trees. At length he reached firmer ground, and began with more cheerful heart to climb up to the open.

Suddenly he heard a rustle, and saw the brush in front of him move.

"Oh, there you are, you brute," he cried, "come in here. Come in, Fido. Here, sir!"

He pushed the bushes aside, and his heart jumped and filled his mouth. A huge, black shape stood right across his path, not ten paces away. A moment they gazed at each other, and then, with a low growl, the bear began to sway awkwardly toward him. Hughie threw up his gun and fired. The bear paused, snapping viciously and tearing at his wounded shoulder, and then rushed on Hughie, without waiting to rise on his hind legs.

Like a flash Hughie dodged behind the brush, and then fled like the wind toward the open. Looking over his shoulder, he saw the bear shambling after him at a great pace, and gaining at every jump, and his heart froze with terror. The balsams and spruces were all too low for safety. A little way before him he saw a small birch. If he could only make that he might escape. Summoning all his strength he rushed for the tree, the bear closing fast upon him. Could he spring up out of the reach of the bear's awful claws?

Two yards from the tree he heard an angry snap and snarl at his heels. With a cry, he dropped his gun, and springing for the lowest bough, drew up his legs quickly after him, with the horrible feeling of having them ripped asunder. To his amazement he found that the bear was not scrambling up the tree after him, but was still some paces off, with Fido skirmishing at long range. It was Fido's timely nip that had brought him to a sudden halt, and allowed Hughie to make his climb in safety.

"Good dog, Fido. Sic him! Sic him, old fellow!" cried out Hughie, but Fido was new to this kind of warfare, and at every jump of the raging brute he fled into the brush with his tail between his legs, returning, however, to the attack as the bear retired.

After driving Fido off, the bear rushed at the tree, and in a fury began tearing up its roots. Then, as if realizing the futility of this, he flung himself upon its trunk and began shaking it with great violence from side to side.

Hughie soon saw that the tree would not long stand such an attack. He slipped down to the lowest bough so that he might be taken from the swaying top, and, encouraging Fido, awaited results.

He found himself singularly cool. Having escaped immediate danger, the hunter's instinct awoke within him, and he longed to get that bear. If he only had his gun he would soon settle him, but the bear, unfortunately, had possession of that. He began hurriedly to cut off as stout a branch as he could to make himself a club. He was not a moment too soon, for the bear, realizing that he could neither tear up the tree by the roots nor shake his enemy out of it, decided, apparently, to go up for him.

He first set himself to get rid of Fido, which he partially succeeded in doing by chasing him a long distance off. Then, with a great rush, he flew at the tree, and with amazing rapidity began to climb.

Hughie, surprised by this swift attack, hastened to climb to the higher branches, but in a moment he saw that this would be fatal. Remembering that the bear is like the

dog in his sensitive parts, he descended to meet his advancing foe, and reaching down, hit him a sharp blow on the snout. With a roar of rage and surprise the bear let go his hold, slipped to the ground, and began to tear up the earth, sneezing violently.

"Oh, if I only had that gun," groaned Hughie, "I'd get him. And if he gets away after Fido again, I believe I'll try it."

The bear now set himself to plan some new form of attack. He had been wounded, but only enough to enrage him, and his fury served to fix more firmly in his head the single purpose of getting into his grip this enemy of his in the tree, whom he appeared to have so nearly at his mercy.

Whatever his new plan might be, a necessary preliminary was getting rid of Fido, and this he proceeded to do. Round about the trees he pursued him, getting farther and farther away from the birch, till Hughie, watching his chance, slipped down the tree and ran for his gun. But no sooner had he stooped for it than the bear saw the move, and with an angry roar rushed for him.

Once more Hughie sprang for his branch, but the gun caught in the boughs and he slipped to the ground, the bear within striking distance. With a cry he sprang again, reached his bough and drew himself up, holding his precious gun safe, wondering how he had escaped. Again it was Fido that had saved him, for, as the bear had gathered himself to spring, Fido, seeing his chance, rushed boldly in, and flinging himself upon the hind leg of the enraged brute, held fast. It was the boy's salvation, but alas! it was Fido's destruction, for, wheeling suddenly, the bear struck a swift downward blow with his powerful front paw, and tore the whole side of the faithful brute wide open. With a howl, poor Fido dragged himself away out of reach and lay down, moaning pitifully.

The bear, realizing that he had got rid of one foe, now proceeded more cautiously to deal with the other, and began warily climbing the tree, keeping his wicked little eyes fixed upon Hughie.

Meantime, Hughie was loading his gun with all speed. He emptied his powder-horn into the muzzle, and with the bear coming slowly nearer, began to search for his bullets. Through one pocket after another his trembling fingers flew, while with the but of his gun he menaced his approaching enemy.

"Where are those bullets?" he groaned. "Ah, here they are!" diving into his trousers pocket. "Fool of a place to keep them, too!"

He took a handful of slugs and bullets, poured them into his gun, rammed down a wadding of leaves upon all, retreating as he did so to the higher limbs, the bear following him steadily. But just as he had his cap securely fixed upon the nipple, the bear suddenly revealed his plan. Holding by his front paws, he threw his hind legs off from the trunk. It was his usual method of felling trees. The tree swayed and bent till the top almost reached the ground, but Hughie, with his legs wreathed round the trunk, brought his gun to his shoulder, and with its muzzle almost touching the breast of the hanging brute, pulled the trigger.

There was a terrific report, the bear dropped as a heap from the tree, and Hughie was hurled violently to the ground some distance away, partially stunned. He raised himself, to see the bear's sagging up to a sitting position and, gnashing his teeth, and bellowing and foam from his mouth, began to drag himself toward him. He was conscious of a languid, half-dazed, and found himself wondering how long the bear would take to reach his distance.

But while Hughie was cogitating there was a sudden bark, and a great black dog dashed itself at the bear's throat, and with the fierce brute to the ground.

Drawing his knife, Hughie sank back to the ground. Hughie sank back to the ground. Hughie sank back to the ground.