

YOUNG CANADA.

THE YOUNG BEAR HUNTERS.

"Come, boys, I guess you'd better go over to Alfred's barn, and get a bundle of hay; there's a little left. The cows haven't had much to eat this mornin'."

The speaker hobbled to a window and looked out upon the stumpy, snow-covered field, for, though it was the first week of May, a heavy storm had come the night before, giving the landscape a decidedly winterish aspect though the warm sun would soon dispel the fleecy covering.

The two boys, Charlie and Ned, started briskly forth on their errand, tramping across the field through the melting snow, where a few head of cattle were striving to satisfy their hunger by nibbling around the stumps where the snow had thawed away. Charlie, fifteen years old, was a rather slight, delicate lad, resembling his mother, while Ned, two years younger, was active and full of life as a young colt.

They trudged along the rough, narrow road through the woods toward their brother's clearing, Ned's voice ringing out in laugh and song, while his companion walked more sedately, swinging a light coil of rope in his hand with which to bind up the much-needed bundle of hay.

Soon they came in sight of the clearing, the walls and roof of the new barn glimmering through the leafless trees. This opening was even smaller than the other, and, like it, was surrounded by huge forest trees on every side, the barn being as yet its only building. As the boys neared this latter, which sat upon cedar posts or "puncheons" set in the ground, leaving an opening of a couple of feet or more under the sill, they noticed tracks in the snow resembling those of an immense dog, and coming from beneath the barn as though the animal, whatever it was, had sought shelter in the empty building from the storm during the night. The tracks zigzagged about the field, and then led in a more direct line to the northward, in which direction the forest extended miles and miles.

"What do you s'pose it is?" asked Ned, after examining the tracks attentively.

"A dog, ain't it?" returned Charlie, who was not as deeply interested as his brother.

"No, there isn't any dog round here with such big feet," answered Ned, decidedly; "let's see what he's been a-doin' in the barn."

They opened the door and entered, Charlie somewhat timidly, Ned with all the eagerness of a rat terrier scenting game. At one end of the barn floor lay a quantity of loose hay, and in the hay at one side in some oat straw Ned found where the animal had slept.

"Didn't he have a snug place?" said Ned, looking into the round nest in the straw as though he wished the animal still occupied it. "I'll bet it was a bear," he continued, as Charlie drew back with a somewhat pale cheek, for he lacked the true hunter's instinct of his younger brother.

"Oh, I guess not, at any rate we've got to get the hay," returned the elder boy, laying the rope upon the barn floor and preparing to tie up the bundle of fodder, but little Ned was out of doors taking observations of the tracks, his eyes ablaze with excitement. Then he rushed into the barn again.

"Come, Charlie," he cried, hurriedly, "let the hay go. We must have that fellow. You run across through the woods and get Billy Jordan's dog and gun. He ain't to home, but his mother'll let you have 'em, and old Tige will tree that bear. I don't believe he's gone 'ur, 'cause he was loafin' down through the woods. I know by the tracks. I'll go over

home and get father's big gun. Come, hurry now."

Little Ned's excitement was contagious, and even Charlie became imbued in a great measure with it, starting off in a southwesterly direction, while Ned hastened home.

"Oh, father, there's a bear slept in Alfred's barn last night, and I want the gun, 'cause me'n Charlie's goin' to shoot him. Charlie's gone over to Jordan's after Billy's dog and gun," and Ned's face was all aglow, as he forced his words out in a bunch.

"Nonsense," said the boy's mother, nervously, "what can you boys do bear-hunting?" but Caleb Strong sympathized with the boy's ardent spirit.

"Let 'em go," he said, "there's ben some-thin' prowlin' round lately, an' p'raps they'll shoot him. Only be careful," he added, as Ned, who needed no second bidding, took down the huge old musket from the hooks over the fire-place and began loading it with the skill of a veteran backwoodsman; "these varmints claw ter'ibly if you git too near too 'em. I wish I was well, I'd go with him, but they won't overhaul the critter," continued the lame man, though the mother looked anxiously after the sturdy little figure that bounded away, gun in hand and powder-horn and bullet-pouch dangling at his side.



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When Ned reached the barn again he found no signs of Charlie, and impelled by his eagerness he at once took the animal's trail. It led crookedly through the field and into the woods, only a few rods away, as though the bear, if bear it was, had loitered along leisurely.

"Charlie'll know I'm gone by my tracks," said the boy to himself as he pressed along through the open woods.

Soon he came to where the animal had scratched about the root of a fallen tree, and here the tracks gave evidence that bruin had stopped and turned about, and then on through the woods straight as a line he had bounded away as though scenting danger.

And at this moment a rush of feet came through the woods behind him, and Ned turned to see Tige, Billy Jordan's big brindle dog, dashing along like the flight of an arrow. Straight on he rushed in the wake of the flying animal, paying no heed to the boy and uttering no sound, and Ned hastened along at his best pace.

The boy's breath came thick with over-exertion, but still he sped onward. All at once the deep baying of Tige broke the stillness.

"He's treed him," cried Ned exultantly, and he paused and turned around to see if he could hear anything of Charlie.

Away back in the distance he heard a faint "hello," which he answered loud and long, while Tige's deep voice on ahead betokened that the game was stationary.

In a few minutes Charlie came up panting as he ran.

"Tige's got him on ahead!" cried Ned, all a-quiver with excitement. "Won't father look if we bring home a bear?"

The boys pressed along. They skirted around a low wet place or "bogin" where the ground was flooded and partially frozen over, for the weather had been cold even for that high latitude, though the bear and the pursuing dog had turned neither to the right nor left.

The dog's barking was growing louder and plainer, and soon they saw him capering wildly about at the foot of a tree in the branches of which a dark mass of shaggy fur could be plainly seen.

Charlie stopped irresolutely, but Ned's courage seemed to rise with the occasion.

"We've got him," he said, his eyes glittering as he drew the hammer of the old musket back. "I'll shoot him and you stand ready to finish him if I don't kill him."

The bear was ensconced in the fork of the tree some twenty feet from the ground, and his attention was now equally divided between the boys and the dog. He snarled and showed his teeth in a savage grin, while old Tige leaped around the foot of the tree in a frenzy of rage.

Little Ned's nerves seemed like steel, while Charlie's face was livid and his teeth fairly chattered, and he stood trembling as his cool brother went around the tree hoping to get a shot at the animal's heart. But the limbs of the tree intervened, and he came behind the bear, saying as he steadied the huge gun against a tree:

"I'm agoin' to shoot," and he closed his lips firmly as his eye glanced along the barrel, while even Tige seemed to hold his breath, and Charlie's heart thumped loudly.

Then a cloud of smoke burst from the muzzle of the gun, a crash reverberated through the woods, and a dark object came down with a heavy blow upon the ground, while Tige grappled with the fallen bear only to be hurled back by a stroke of the animal's powerful forepaw, against the trunk of a tree, where he lay half stunned by the shock, while the wounded bear, which had been hit near the small of the back, dragged himself toward the dog to finish his work.

Ned sprang forward with upraised gun to protect Tige, and the bear with a howl faced the boy.

Charlie seemed ready to sink with terror. He saw the white teeth of the bear, and realized the danger of his dauntless little brother, and then his weak, nerveless hands became strong. He brought the gun to his shoulder, again a sharp report echoed among the trees, and the bear clawed and tore the snow-covered leaves in his death struggle.

Poor Tige limped sorrowfully home, but the boys, especially Charlie, were elated with pride at their successful bear-hunt.—*The Golden Argosy*.

A LESSON IN SWIMMING.

A seal-mother gives a curious display of maternal solicitude in teaching her calf to swim. First taking hold of it by the flipper, and for a while supporting it above water, with a shove she sends the youngster adrift, leaving it to shift for itself. In a short time, the little creature becomes exhausted, when she takes a fresh grip on its flipper, and again supports it till it has recovered breath, after which there is another push off, followed by a new attempt to swim, the same process being several times repeated to the end of the lesson.—*From "The Land of Fire," by Mayne Reid.*