

James Oliver Curwood, a Champion of Forests and Wild Life

How the noted writer turned from hunting to conserving wild animals

(An interview in the Dearborn Independent.)

"I AM fighting for wild life harder than I ever hunted. With these guns, I have left red trails to Hudson's Bay, to the Barren Lands, to the country of the Athabasca and the Great Bear, to the Arctic Ocean, to the Yukon and Alaska, and throughout British Columbia. This is not intended as a paean of triumph. It is a fact which I wish had never existed. And yet it may be that my love of nature and the wild things, at the last, is greater because of those years of reckless killing. I am inclined to believe so. In my pantheistic heart, the mounted heads in my home are no longer crowned with the grandeur of trophies, but rather with the nobility of martyrs. I love them. I am no longer their enemy, and I warm myself with the belief that they know I am fighting for them now.

"In this religion of the open, I have come to understand and gather peace from the whispering voices and even the silence of all God-loving things. I have learned to love trees.

"I am not merely fighting for the conservation of wild life. It is my belief that next to God and religion the two greatest words in the languages of all the world are conservation and propagation, but of all natural resources, and especially forests. Our future, our very lives, you might say, depend on the conservation of the resources which nature has given us. We have annihilated our forests to such a point that Michigan, for instance, is now a wood-importing state, where only a short time ago it was one of the greatest timber producing states in the Union. Last year the freight bill for Michigan's imported timber alone was \$10,000,000, or sufficient to reforest 150,000 acres of our 10,000,000 acres of burned over and waste lands. And wild life as well

as the welfare of the human lives depends first of all upon our forests. Without forests our rivers will become barren and dry up, and our smaller lakes disappear. And the wheels of almost every industry will cease to move. My belief is the biggest thing a state can do toward this conservation is to take the work of conservation and propagation out of politics. Politics can run a government or a nation, but politics can run neither God nor our national resources. When it comes to religion and conservation the rule of politics, greed and ambition is a menace and a crime.

"The most logical and best place to begin teaching humanity the value and necessity of conservation and propagation of our natural resources is in the public schools. Children should be made to understand that trees are as important to the welfare of this earth as they themselves are. They should be taught to see the necessity and beauty of planting trees, and of protecting all forms of wild life which are not inimical to our welfare. They should be made to understand that if all wild life and vegetation were taken from the earth tomorrow, the human race would within a very short time become as extinct as the Dodo and Brontosaurus. Within a few months the whole world would be a madhouse of disease, famine and death. To my mind, the most beautiful thing in the world is to teach a child not only the necessity of protecting and encouraging nature, but the beauty of it as well.

"I think the most dramatic climax of my desire to let live came when I was seeking material for my book, 'The Grizzly King.' With a pack outfit of a dozen horses I had gone into the British Columbia mountains,

and in a wonderful valley I came one day upon the track of a huge grizzly bear. It was the biggest track I had ever seen, and as there was no particular limit set to my time, I struck camp. For three weeks my mountain companion and I hung to that grizzly. He was a monster, weighing 1,200 pounds, if he weighed an ounce. I watched him feed. I saw him fight. I followed up his daily life until gradually there came over me an overwhelming desire to possess the skin and head of this king of the mountains for myself. I named him Thor, and I began to watch my opportunity to kill him. At the end of the first two weeks, I believe he felt that I was not going to harm him. Then I got a shot and put a bullet through his shoulder. After that it was a game between the cunning and trickery of two men's brains and a brute's instincts. I got two more shots on two different days and hit him both times. The third time I was surprised that Thor did not face the battle and charge. And then almost a week later, the thing happened. I had climbed the steep side of a mountain to get a look over the valley with my hunting glasses, and rested my gun against a rock. Then I went 40 or 50 feet farther on, following a narrow ledge, until I found myself in a little pocket, with a sheer wall of the mountain at my back, and a 100-foot precipice below me. Here I sat down and began to scan the valley. Perhaps 15 minutes had passed when I heard a sound that stopped every drop of blood in my body—the click, click, click of clawed feet coming along the ledge. With my rifle 50 feet away, and no escape up or down, I sat petrified. And then along the ledge came Thor!

"He stopped squarely in front of me, not more than six feet away, and