

## Our Young Folks.

### CANOE AND RIFLE ON THE ORINOCO.

#### IN FIVE CHAPTERS.—CHAP. I.

##### AN ADVENTURE.

At last every thing was in perfect readiness; and on the morning of February 28, they bade adieu to their new friends in Bolivar, took up their paddles, pushed off into the stream and started on their adventurous trip down the river.

About ten miles below the city the canoe voyagers came to a locality which showed signs of crocodiles; and they landed to explore it.

On the south side of the river lay a very extensive, low sand-bank nearly two miles long, by half a mile wide. The lower third of it rose abruptly into an island as high as the level of the surrounding country, and covered with dense scrub jungle. Between this little island and the main shore still farther south, lay a deep and placid lagoon.

As the two hunters stood on the island, at the edge of the steep bank, and scanned the glassy surface of the lagoon, a huge old crocodile rose almost directly opposite them, and floated lazily at the surface, with every line of his scaly body and saw-like tail sharply defined in the clear water.

"There! Look at that now, will you! Didn't I tell you they were here?" muttered David.

"Twelve feet if he's an inch!" said Ben, staring hard at the reptile. "If we only had our canoe here now, eh!"

"We must get it here in short order. I'll warrant that lagoon is full of crocodiles. Let's bring our boat around, camp right here for a week and hunt these fellows regularly. If we don't find some work here for our rifles, we never will, that's certain."

Half an hour later their canoe glided into the lower end of the lagoon, and the adventurers were paddled along the bank of the island until they arrived opposite a clump of small trees. Here they landed, and taking a hasty lunch, set off along the shore to look for crocodiles.

Nor had they long to look; for as they approached the upper end of the island, they saw a dark object ahead lying at the water's edge. Ben levelled his glass at it directly.

"That's one, as sure as fate!" he exclaimed. "I wonder if he will let us within range!"

Almost as he spoke, as if in answer to his question, the crocodile turned about, headed away from the shore and floated lazily out into the deep water.

"He's no fool, I tell you!" exclaimed David. "Somebody has been shooting here lately, or he wouldn't be so wary. But if we go back and get out of sight, he'll be likely to come up to the shore again. We must climb up to the top of the bank, go back out of sight, and swing around until we get opposite where he is, then crawl up to the edge and shoot. Do you see that little scraggy tree yonder at the edge of the bank? Well, that must be about opposite him, and we'll come out close to that."

The proposed movement was cautiously executed. "We must make sure work with this fellow," said David in an excited whisper. "You know we've got to hit his spinal column, and we must kill him dead, where he lies, or he'll get off into the water and be gone. A miss is as good as a mile for him." "All right," said Ben, who was also eager for a shot. "We'll crawl up to that bunch of weeds at the edge, I'll count three, and we'll blaze away together to make sure work."

They dropped quietly upon the ground, left their pith hats behind them, and crept towards the edge of the bank. The ground was almost bare, and the midday sun beat down fiercely upon their bare heads. They reached the edge and cautiously looked over.

The reptile was there! He lay in the water with only his head out in the sand, and it was plain to be seen that only a sure shot would stop him. Two rifle barrels slid slowly over the edge and rested there.

"Shall we let him have it?" said David, in a gentle whisper.

"Yes. Hit his spinal column, ahead of the shoulders. Ready now—one—two—three!"

"Bang! bang!"

The huge saurian's long, slender jaws instantly flew wide open and remained so,

while the limbs quivered convulsively, as if the animal had received a powerful electric shock. Otherwise it did not move.

"Hurrah! He's our crock!" shouted David, as they sprang to their feet and reloaded.

"Don't be too sure now," said cautious Ben. "Better not say that until you got him by the tail. Look there now—if he isn't trying to get away!"

The crocodile was struggling, and had already turned a quarter-way round. A little farther and he would be headed for deep water.

"Give him another shot!"

They both fired again, but in their excitement their bullets failed to hit the vital spot.

"Go for him! Go for his tail, quick!" cried Ben, as he dropped his rifle and started. They had to run nearly a hundred yards along the bank before coming to a place where they could scramble down. Then down they went pell-mell at the risk of breaking their necks; and as they reached the lower level, they saw their coveted crocodile headed for the deep water and slowly disappearing. They raced along the sand at full speed, but by the time they reached the spot where the reptile had lain, nothing but the end of his tail was visible in the water. Foot by foot, he was getting away from them. There was only one way to recover him—and that a dangerous one.

"Come on partner!" cried Ben, recklessly.

Without a moment's hesitation they rushed into the water and waded out till within reach of the tail.

"Now then!" shouted David; and together they seized the monster by the tail and began dragging him ashore.

But it was a risky manoeuvre.

#### CHAPTER II.

##### ANOTHER CROCODILE.

It was indeed a risky manoeuvre.

For no sooner did the crocodile feel their grasp on his tail, than he began a tremendous struggle to free himself and to snap at his assailants. It required all their strength to retain their grip on him, and prevent his wrenching his tail out of their hands.

"Hang to him, partner!" panted Ben. Steadily they backed toward the shore, gaining foot by foot, dragging the great saurian after them.

But by this time the reptile was thoroughly aroused, and struggling with great violence. Putting forth all their strength they were barely able to overmatch his efforts.

"Come in out of the wet, ye varmint!" shouted David triumphantly, as they dragged the struggling monster out upon the sand. "And don't you go near the water any more! Oh, you'd bite, would you?" he added, as the crocodile gave a vicious snap sideways at him. Its bony jaws and cruel glittering teeth came together with a blood-curdling crash, but so long as his assailants held fast to his tail, he could not turn around far enough to catch them.

"Now we must have a rifle, David, to give him a finisher. You run up the bluff and get one, and I'll hold him," said Ben, determinedly.

"Why, man alive, you can't do it!" cried David.

"Well, I will do it, anyhow! You go on. Don't wait, but give him a shot from up there—he's such a thing to hold to—and be quick!"

David scaled the bank, ran to where his rifle lay, and reloaded it while he got in a position for a shot. The crocodile was now struggling more violently than ever, and snapping viciously first one side and then the other; but Ben held to it.

"Give it to him, quick!" he shouted, appealingly.

David dropped upon one knee, aimed carefully for the neck vertebra, and fired. Again the reptile's jaw flew open, but the eyes were tightly shut and the limbs stiffened and quivered. In a few minutes the creature was dead.

"That skin is worth thirty-three dollars, old man!" David exclaimed.

On the next afternoon, while David was busy at camp with the final preparation of the three crocodile skins, Ben unloaded the canoe and paddled off alone. He went down to the outlet of the lagoon, crossed the river to a low sand-bank they had observed lying a few miles below, and returned at night in quite a state of excitement.

He reported having landed on the other sand bank, which was of great extent; and having crossed it, he found a narrow lagoon lying between it and the main shore.

While walking along the bank, he came suddenly in sight of an immense crocodile, very much larger than the one they had already killed.

He tried to get a shot at it, but there was no cover of any kind, and in crawling over the sand, the reptile saw him and plunged into the water.

"To-morrow we will go after him, and bring him home," said David, confidently.

Accordingly, early next morning they paddled across the river, dragged their canoe up high and dry on the shore, and with their rifles on their shoulders, set out across the sand-bank. Ben christened it the "Little Sahara," on account of vast extent, utter baroness and irregular, billowy surface. The day was hot, and the radiation from the dry, heated sand was like the breath of a furnace.

##### A DISCOVERY.

Long before they could see the water of the lagoon, at the farther side of the little desert, they espied a crocodile lying out on the sand. Dropping on their hands and knees, they endeavored to approach within rifle range, but the reptile was too wide awake. They were still two hundred yards away, when it suddenly started forward, slid into the water and disappeared. The hunters had risen to their feet to go on, when Ben exclaimed, in an undertone,—

"Down, David! down! There's the big one lying out below!"

He was right. A hundred yards farther down and well out upon the bank, lay an ugly, muddy looking old crocodile, of perfectly enormous size. He lay with his legs stretched out lazily, his head flat upon the sand, and his eyes shut, basking in the hot sunshine. His peculiar gray and weathered appearance, and the absence of bright colors on his scales, plainly indicated that he was "an old settler," while his plump body and limbs showed that he lived well. With but one exception he was the largest crocodile the hunters had ever seen, and they determined to have him.

Crouching low upon the sand, they planned the attack. There was not the smallest bush, weed, or tuft of grass to afford cover for an approach, and their only resource was to take what little advantage they could of the inequalities of the ground.

On hands and knees they made their way down, until they arrived opposite their game; then after carefully studying the lay of the hollows and the height of the ridges, they started forward.

At first they were able to advance along a hollow and behind a succession of ridges; but these all ended abruptly when the hunters were still a hundred and fifty yards away. Leaving their hats behind, they now lay flat upon the loose, hot sand, and with the back of the crocodile in full view, crawled slowly forward. All the while they were in dreadful suspense, lest the wily old saurian should suddenly take alarm, plunge into the water, and render that day's work fruitless.

But it was absolutely necessary for them to get nearer. Their rifles were of small calibre for such a huge animal; and bare-headed, hot and excited as they were, they knew it would be folly to fire at long range.

Slowly and laboriously they dragged themselves forward, until only a hundred yards separated them from their coveted prize. Would he wait longer?

It was too uncertain to fire at that distance, all things considered, and in sheer desperation they kept on.

The sand filled their clothes and covered their perspiring faces and hands, but they carefully kept it out of the muzzles of their rifles. Twenty-five yards farther, and the crocodile suddenly raised his head and looked about suspiciously. He must have thought a pair of big turtles were coming toward him, or he would surely have fled.

The hunters stopped instantly, and remained for several minutes without moving a muscle. It was high time to fire. Slowly, very slowly, they got their rifles in position, cocked them, and wiped the perspiration out of their eyes. David then whispered softly,—

"Ready! One—two—three!"

Their rifles spoke together, and instantly they sprang to their feet. Like an echo to the shots, the crocodile's jaws flew wide open, and shut again with a loud snap!

Then it ran quickly down the sloping bank into the water; but, to the astonishment of the hunters, it wheeled about and as quickly rushed out again!

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

#### A Little Mother.

She had so many children she really did not know what to do. The home was too small or the family too large—she could not tell which. Then there was a good deal of unhappiness about dinners. If there were not quite so many of them, everything would be lovely and the dinners quite delightful.

She pondered this matter long and earnestly in her sober fashion, for she was not a talkative mother. Now the little mother knew there were other houses not far away where there were no children. Perhaps, if she took some of her family to the other houses, the folks would take them in and give them all good homes. She knew the people very well, though she had really never spoken to any of them. What better than to take her babies there, and leave them in the care of these good people? So she started off one day with three of her babies.

They could toddle after her, and were eager enough to go. She walked just as fast as she could, and when they reached the next house the poor things were tired out, and lay down on the door step as much as to say they really could not go any farther. The little mother seemed to think it was all right, and started to the next house. One of the babies could not leave his mother, and though very tired, followed slowly after her.

Presently the little mother reached the next house, and her baby came trotting after, and the moment he reached the place he lay down and fell fast asleep. Poor thing! he was very tired. The folks in the house came out to look at him, and the little mother said, as plainly as she could, "He is a good child, and I will give him to you if you will take good care of him." The people seemed to understand her feelings perfectly, and said the baby could stay. The next day she took two more of her babies, and going down the road in the opposite direction, she left one at a farm-house and one at the cottage of a widow woman.

There were three children left at home, and these she decided to keep. The next day the strangest thing happened—two of the other babies who had gone to other home back. The little mother was not pleased with this, and carried them back again, as much as to say that she wished them to stay in the nice places she had provided for them. After that she visited all her absent children once a week, and talked to them in her quiet way, and even played with them to keep them contented. She was indeed a wise and thoughtful mother, though only a beautiful setter with eight small pups.

#### An Animal Apple-Gatherer.

Gathering fruit is a frequent practice of animals, and yet there is a stratagem attributed to that "walking bunch of tooth-picks" called the hedgehog, which is curious enough to deserve special mention. It seems that fruit is frequently found in the hedgehog's sleeping apartment, and its presence there is explained in this remarkable way: It is known that hedgehogs often climb walls, and run off upon low boughs, and instead of scrambling down in the same manner, they boldly make the leap from the top to the ground, sometimes ten or twelve feet. They coil into a ball in the air, strike upon their armor of spines, and bound away unharmed. In taking this jump, they have been seen to fall upon fallen fruit, which, thus impaled upon their spines, was carried away by them; and this has given rise to the opinion that in some such way they may have stored their winter homes.

Despair makes a desperately ill-tempered and descends from a mean original. 'Tis the offspring of fear, of laziness and impatience; it argues a defect of spirit and resolution, and oftentimes of honesty, too.

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