

A Christmas Day's Yarn

BY BONNYCASTLE DALE

Photographs of the "young naturalist" "Laddie"

Written and illustrated for "The Western Home Monthly"

BOTH the lad and I often remark, "that story will go away off to Winnipeg!" First we did for you the rude Pacific coast with its Indians and wild life, then Ontario's great hunting ground and now the life along the boisterous Atlantic, with a sad interlude of Belgium and France when the cruel war raged and "Laddie Sr." went across and fought for us (he is in civil life now, well and happy). Ten years have slipped away since we sent our first story of our daily travels to your editor—ten years! Not much to Laddie Jr. and my young readers but a large slice off the life of an old nature writer

their cases and slung them over our backs and, hand in hand, made the shore. I never saw greater or longer seas than hammered on that rocky point—out of the spindrift would come an unearthly screech as if the hag who rides the gales was exulting in her work. Far out, over the spume and

were the seas that her tops were flat and shaken in valleys yet they blew out stiff and hard as marble on the crests. We hung on to a tree and watched her pass out of sight around a distant point and just then we saw the black snout of a tramp—deep-laden, too—come out past the point, heading

use my small binoculars, but they were soaked in a moment. Up a mighty sea she climbed and stuck her long black hull out as if she were a great flying submarine about to take off. Then she balanced on the top of the great roaring sea like a child's toy steamer and was sucked down into the next huge watery chasm.

With wind-forced tears streaming down our faces we watched her cross the wide harbor mouth and saw her black stern disappear behind the northern point. We heard later that she made Halifax with only the loss of deck gear—her load of molasses made



Launching a lifeboat to face a Nova Scotia storm.



Laddie was swept ashore by the next huge sea when he stepped off the rock. Look again at this, our rarest picture.

like me—and there is Labrador and Newfoundland yet to do with all their heroic life—I think you, dear readers will last longer than I will?

Here it is, the Glad Christmas season again. We are housebound in the most ancient house along all these wild shores, a place with big room, great fireplaces, old-time brick baking-ovens and many an old nook and cranny. The storm from off the Atlantic tears over the roof and howls down the chimney and scatters the sparks broadcast over the floor. The gale outside is humming like a hive of monstrous bees, making the old timbers of this trembling house shake like palsy. It is as dark as the deeps of a coal mine and the sleet has frozen on the glacial rocks and stubble that form the field about us until it is almost impossible to poke your nose out of the door let alone walk. We are well and warm and happy, getting out the illustrations for this story while the storm shakes at the door like an unwelcome guest.

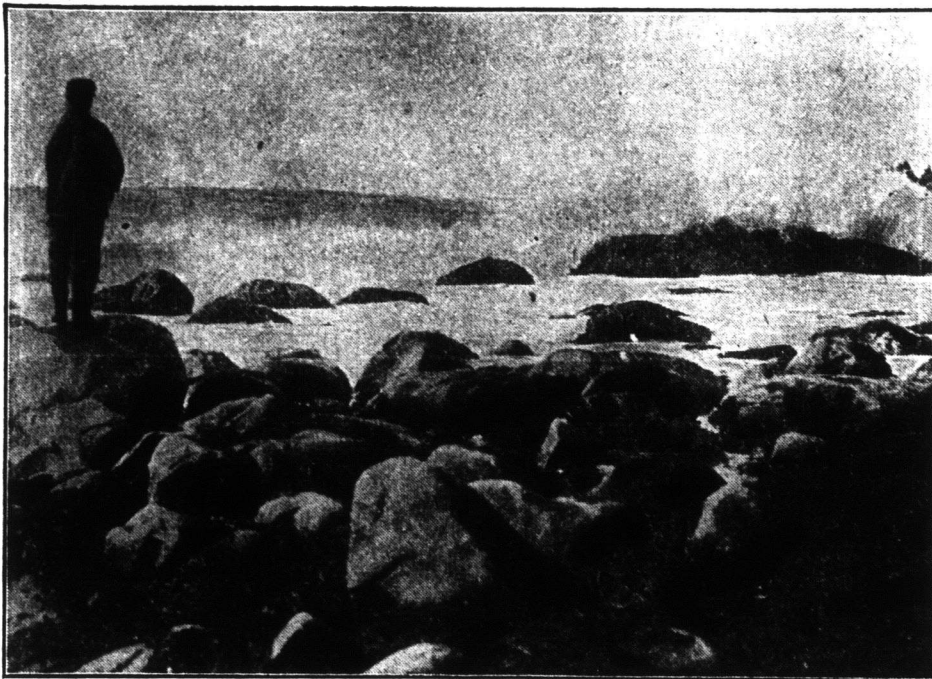
"Here's an appropriate one," says the boy by my side in the red glow of the fire. "It's 'Launching the Lifeboat,' and you can see the outer head of the harbor in it, and here are the surf pictures!"

And he passed to me the pictures I wish to write about.

First of all, look at your young photographer all clad in oilskins, snapping the surf off Herring Rock Point. There was a dead-easter blowing just as there is this Christmas night and the trees were bending and the fishermen's cabins shaking to the strumming of the storm. We stumbled and struggled across the point through the wet spruce, splashing through the wee lagoons and clambering over the glacial boulders left here in the ice age. Once we emerged from the slight shelter of the woods the wind met us with full force—you could almost lie right out on it, so steady and strong was its thrumming passage. There had been disaster and bits of wreckage were coming ashore.

The tide was out and the slippery rock-weed and storm-wrenched cliffs were traps for the unwary, as I sat down nice and fast into a cold tide-pool—on, on we struggled to the outer low tide-line and faced the worst of it. Laddie climbed on ahead and took the incoming surf and I pictured him at it. Safe though we were on these rocks we constantly watched the tide, ready to run at the first sign of anything unusual.

We took a set of pictures of the awful turmoil and put our machines in



Laddie photographing great sea pouring in.



Great seas swept over the breakwater, hurling rocks as big as barrels out like pebbles.

wreck of the storm, we spied a little fishing schooner jockeying over the mighty waves. At times she balanced in the white turmoil of a crest as if she was undecided whether to leap off and slide down or to "take it over the poop" and perish in the back-trough. So huge

right into the seas—she had to as she was far in near the rocks. A mighty mass of seething, swirling water raced at her and broke against her dark bow and leaped up like a gigantic bubble and shut her from view—sluicing her clean from stem to stern. I tried to

her ride low. Back we ran, storm-aided, and made a fire and boiled our billy, then the tragic, graphic scene tempted us out again and nearly ended the career of your young photographer.

The scene inside the harbor was only second to that of the open sea. We watched the long, regular swells with their boiling white tops, come pouring in.

"Look!" said Laddie, "It's going right over the breakwater!" So we ran up on the shingle and pictured it. Here was a structure built as firmly as man can build and then filled with huge glacial boulders of several hundred pounds weight each. The mighty power of the wind-driven waves popped these out of the breakwater as a boy pops peas. It seemed, before the storm, utterly impossible that any power of rushing water could lift these huge stones, but they pounded out over the stringer as if they were but floating corks.

Deeply impressed we straggled back. The whole bay before us was creamy white with the low tide "run in" and the surf seemed to gather force and display it in the shallows.

"Grand picture," howled Laddie into my ear, and off he stumbled right out in the wake of a retreating surf. He made the rocks and clambered up on to the shining, glittering wet surface of the biggest one, when like a millrace came the returning surf. Laddie disappeared from view and I was so alarmed that I forgot to snap the big machine. Away swept the sea and out ran the surf. I saw him brace himself for another deluge and again neglected to picture him. More assured of his safety I did snap him when the third great wave covered him with its on-rushing spume. Evidently alarmed, he watched its retreat and slid down off the huge boulder on to the next—struck some rock-weed and slipped off into the water just in time to be covered by the next huge sea. He clutched and scrambled and swam and grasped something to escape being swept out. By the time I reached the tide-line he was splashing ashore like some great sea animal, safely ahead of the suction of the surf.

We are very thankful this sacred day that he was spared—how he ever fell without stunning himself is a wonder. So, thankfully from this far-off lonely shore, we send to our dear readers in The Western Home Monthly, its editor and staff and our good printers, a Merry Christmas wish.