

BOYS AND GIRLS

Left Behind in the Mountain.

(By Henry Elliot Thibadeau, in 'The Youth's Companion.' In Three Parts.)

PART I.

After graduating from college, I had left my home in Massachusetts to go west and teach school. After the first month a fire had burned nearly all the new town and destroyed the schoolhouse.

Then I journeyed to Winnipeg, and afterwards drifted to Calgary in quest of work. There sharp necessity had forced me to labor as a common 'navvy' with pick and shovel on the new Canadian Pacific Railway, then under construction from Calgary to British Columbia.

Here I had had long months of hard, rough life with the turbulent construction

feigned for the purpose of shirking; and the kindly disposed are hard-worked, tired laborers, having little time to spend with invalids. As I lay, unable to move, groaning a great deal—for the slightest jar or motion caused me the keenest anguish—I of course became an affliction to my mates.

The company's surgeon had been absent for some time, and it is doubtful if he could have done much to benefit me, anyway. At last, when the road-bed was completed to a considerable distance beyond our camp in the lower valley of the pass, the entire gang was moved forward for fifteen or twenty miles.

Here I became delirious, and during my delirium orders had evidently been issued for a farther advance. I knew indistinctly that the men were trying to move me. I must have cried out with such agony and frenzy that at last they despaired for

probably returned after that, for I came out of a sort of dream that two men were trying to move me.

As a matter of fact, I learned long afterwards that no one had ever returned for me. Two of the men who had tried to move me were injured the next day in an accident; the others, ignorant and brutal half-breeds, were probably too indifferent to return, and possibly the majority of the navvies were unaware for days of my absence. It is wonderful that I was not attacked by hungry grizzlies, or panthers; for the Selkirks were then much infested by these animals.

When consciousness again returned to me I was too weak to move, and lay sleeping or dozing probably for two or three days. Then I contrived to sit up on the edge of my bunk and I have a pretty clear remembrance of subsequent happenings.

It was now the season when raspberries were ripe, and one of my first excursions outside the door of the camp was to a cluster of raspberry-bushes, where I ate greedily all the berries I could reach. I was still excruciatingly lame and sore, and bent like an old man.

The now deserted camp was situated in the bottom of a great ravine, nearly a mile below the line of railway skirting the mountainside. There were three large shanties for a hundred men or more, and across the creek, at a distance of perhaps two hundred yards, were two other log camps, which had sheltered a gang of lumbermen who had gone ahead of our crew, making trestle timber.

The larger of their two camps had lost its roof, doors and lighter woodwork by fire; its walls of massive green spruce logs were merely much blackened. Their smaller cabin remained as they had left it. They had cleared a considerable tract of the adjacent forest of its great spruce and pine trees. In the three camps left by our main gang I found many odds and ends from the food supplies: a quantity of beans, more than half a barrel of pork, and as much corned beef, a box and a half of hard biscuit, a box of matches and numerous other articles.

The bread had, perhaps, been left behind for my benefit, the other stores carelessly, for despite the great expense of conveying provisions into this remote region, there was always a great deal of waste. Broken tools also lay about—axes, bars, shovels, picks, a quantity of cordage and a reel of telegraph wire.

In such circumstances I began my hermit life. At first it was enforced on me by my crippled condition; but when, some weeks later, I heard at a distance the sledgehammers of men laying rails for the road, I felt no disposition to hobble up the mountainside to them, or make my presence known. I knew I had been a great trouble to my mates, and I resolved to avoid human beings until I should be able to work as of old. As none of the trackmen came down to the old camps, my resolution was not tempted to fail.

Of the exceeding loneliness of my life here I shall not attempt to say much, but it was not without its enjoyments. The tremendous mountain scenery, at first so forbiddingly grand, took on in time a more familiar and friendly aspect. Out to the westward, steel-gray peak Sir Donald and the Hermit Mountain towered mid-heaven, crowned with eternal snow and ice. How many hours I watched the play of the golden sunset on those tremendous rock-pinna-



HIS HEAD SWINGING FITFULLY TO AND FRO IN THE MOONLIGHT

gangs. At last we had reached Donald, crossed the Columbia, and entered the stupendous cañons of Roger's Pass and the ravines of the Illicilliwaet.

Passengers who now journey over the line in comfortable railway coaches observe the scenery here not only with admiration, but with a sense of awe; but we, who first cut the way through these wild gorges, felt more than awe—a sense of constant peril and hardship.

After we had labored for weeks in rain or drenching mists, blasting down the ledges, tunneling and grading, rheumatic fever, complicated with cerebral meningitis, laid me low. My limbs swelled and stiffened, my pains were agonizing. A sick man does not gain much sympathy or attention in a camp of rough navvies. There are always some who think his illness

through my unconsciousness I heard one say, 'Well, we've got to leave him, then. I'll get somebody and come back for him tomorrow. Most likely he'll be dead by then, anyway.'

When I came to my senses, I found a bucket containing water set near my bunk, a can half-full of porridge and a case of hard biscuit.

I lay in my bunk and looked at a Rocky Mountain marmot which had entered at the open door of the log camp. I think the singularly shrill 'whistle' of this odd little animal had roused me. I was still feverish and in terror at the thought of being moved, so racked and swollen were my limbs.

After a time I reached out for the dipper and drank copiously from the bucket. I think that I also attempted to gnaw one of the hard-bread cakes. The delirium