

"The Flapper"

A Story of the Beaver and its Habits

By Otto Leonard Anderson

On a small stream that empties into the upper Mississippi, there lives a colony of Beaver, protected by the laws of humanity and left, in solitude, to enjoy their isolated existence. Here we find them moving back and forth through the water as they perform their daily tasks, damming their home waters and creating a large pool covering what formerly comprised a small acreage of clover land. Undisturbed they live, cut off from the rest of the world and forming a small government of their own; each content to be among his own companions and far away from the harm that civilization would undoubtedly bring to them.

Often have we heard the remark "Working like a Beaver." There is little time for play in a Beaver's life. When it is not busy storing poplar twigs on the bottom of the pond for future use, it is busily engaged repairing one of its engineering feats. The remaining time is spent exploring the immediate vicinity of its home, at all times keeping well within sight of the water and continually watching for its most feared enemy—the human being. I sometimes wonder what is the real reason for the Beaver's presence upon this earth. It seems as if its entire life was dedicated to destruction and yet, at times, the good which it does proves to be of equal value to the destruction. Working unceasingly, with a fervor that is strangely lacking in human nature, this little animal goes about its duties as though they were planned and mapped out for it. Strange as it may seem, I believe that there is a real purpose for their presence here if it is nothing more than to assist Nature in retarding the flow of our streams. It is fortunate, that in only a few instances, the high waters which their dams eventually bring about, have inconvenienced us by flooding roads and hampering traffic in our rural sections. These animals are protected by man-made laws until the destruction which they cause becomes considerable. When they are killed it is usually because they have made an enemy of one of our law-abiding citizens, through their misguided industry.

There is no animal that offers a more interesting study, for the amusement of our inquisitive research workers, than the Beaver. Their habits, nature and physique prove to be well worth the time one spends in studying them.

Strange also, there is no lust in the human race, for the lives of these animals. Few men desire to kill them unless for commercial use or for the good of the community. The sight of a wolf or squirrel excites the sporting blood in the majority of our citizens but strangely, few men ever kill the Beaver for the love of sport. They possess a certain pleasing personality which protects them from physical violence. Often times I have been in a position to take their lives but remained content to watch them work and study their traits and characteristics. Were it a wolf, deer or any other wild animal undoubtedly my desire to kill would have over-ruled my inquisitiveness and my first thought would be to kill. Then, as most men, I would compliment myself for having committed a crime against an innocent creature with practically no means of protection against the methods and weapons adopted by man.

THE colony had grown considerably since the Spring litter had been added to its number. Ten in all, they now formed a government of their own, capable of protecting the rights which Nature had given them and safe from the violence of man. Two sets of adult Beaver and six young ones comprised the clan. Commerce and revenge had claimed five of their number and left the deep pang of fear in the hearts of those remaining.

There was but one of them, at the present time, that showed signs of being beyond control of her elders. This one had been properly christened the "Flapper". The stories of how her brothers and sisters had met their fate meant nothing to her. Her parents' continual pleadings were of no avail. She had resolved to enjoy herself at any cost. Bygones were bygones to her—they were just accidents. She let them go at that.

Her brother was less adventuresome. He was content to remain under the careful guidance of the parental eye. Whatever his parents told him he swallowed whole, and bore in mind that at all times, he was to take precaution against bodily harm. Next came his work and last his pleasure,

which was to him, being able to take an occasional promenade into the vicinity around their home. On these visits into foreign lands, he was always accompanied by one of his elders, who would remain close at hand and warn him of any approaching dangers. His name was "Dab".

The father was solemn as the Sphinx itself a strong, compact animal weighing about 50 pounds. At an early age he had been the victim of a trap and his continued presence in the colony, was accounted for only because he had decided to go through life without the use of his left foreleg, which he had chewed off. Like the Flapper, his disposition had been a roving one and the current opinion was to the effect that she had inherited this trait from him. Her cautious mother at intervals reminded her spouse of this fact. "Certainly the girl does not take after me", she would remark when another incident in the Flapper's life had caused their blood to run cold.

The remaining members were distant relatives and had migrated with the Flapper's family from a point a mile or two upstream, after the previous death toll had warned them that that place was no longer

safe. "Caution" was their motto. No unnecessary chances were taken by any of them. All watched with open mouths when the Flapper went by, bent on another exploration. "Surely it has been only pure luck that she is still with us," they would remark.

Yet the Flapper went steadily on. Unconvinced by the entreaties of the others: "I'll take care of myself, you mind your own business," she had told the neighbors on one occasion. Since then her will had been undisputed. Her parents had long since given up the thought of educating her to the dangers that existed and had to content themselves with the thought that she would learn them herself—and she did.

We first find our protege working unceasingly with two more of the clan. Their object was to fell a tall poplar tree which for some time had caused the Flapper considerable inconvenience because it blocked a ready path leading up from the water. Their intentions were to have the tree fall toward the stream. Its size had assured them that it would easily cover the entire distance and leave a much desired bridge. The three of them had worked diligently for an hour gnawing at the trunk of the tree