

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

AN EAGLE'S EGG.

By William Rittenhouse.

The nest's right over there, beyond Culver's Mountain," said Jack, pointing to one of the craggy sides of the lower peak. "They're golden eagles all right, too. I'm going to have one of the eggs, Jim, see if I don't! Why, I'd rather have it than all the good times Uncle Fred is giving us here; honest, I would."

The twins were standing in one of the outlying fields of the ranch. Behind them, in the distance, their uncle's substantial ranch-house could be seen, with the other buildings for men and horses grouped round it. In front rose the line of hills that bounded the pastures on the south, jagged brown hills, with few trees, clearly defined against the brilliant sky of the west. Jack and Jim had been only a few months in this western country, and were enthusiastic about ranch life.

Jim was listening to Jack now, with interested attention. "What's the place like where the nest is? Does Harvey know about it?" he asked. Harvey was an orphan lad who had grown up on the ranch, and whom the boys had chosen as their "guide, philosopher, and friend," from the beginning of their visit.

"Oh, Harvey says we can't possibly get at the eggs," said Jack impatiently. "The nest is way up on a ledge of the rock, under the overhang of Ball's Cliff. He says we can't climb up there any way we try; but I'm going to try, just the same."

Jim considered. "What's the matter with climbing down?" he suggested. "Tie a good rope around me, and I wouldn't mind swinging down to the ledge a bit."

Jack's face lighted up eagerly. "Jim, you're a dandy!" he cried.

The twins never did anything by halves. Harvey, and a stout rope were forthcoming before a half hour was over. By Harvey's advice, they stuck knives in their belts, and he carried his rifle. "Them eagles is full of fight sometimes," he remarked, as they set off on their ponies, "and then other times they'll vamose when you come within a mile of 'em. You never can tell which they'll do, so you've got to be ready both ways."

"Guess it'll be kind of snowy up there," said Jim, as they turned into the ravine that led up the side of Culver's Mountain. It was an April day, with plenty of sunlight and warmth in the air, but the mountains were still patched with snow. Up and up the three young hunters went on their hardy little ponies and the boys were glad to rest awhile. As they sat near the broken edge of the rock they could see one of the golden eagles lazily soaring in the blue, round and round, in slow, wide, majestic circles.

Evidently the great bird had no idea of the danger menacing his nest; and as they watched him, he sailed farther and farther toward the south, disappearing among the passes and peaks.

"Got rid of one of 'em, anyway," said Harvey. "Now let's look over at that nest." They crawled to the edge and peered over. The cliff fell away abruptly from that point, and, at a distance of perhaps fifty feet below them, on a spur of rock only a few feet wide, a mass of sticks, moss, grass and mountain fern, lay as if flung in a heap. The mother eagle, unconscious, apparently, of any intruder, near her nest, sat drowsily there, her wings drooped and her head low. Even so, they could see what a splendid creature she was, with her dark-brown back shading to purple, her golden-brown head and neck, her dark wings and tail, her mighty beak, and large, deep-set eyes.

"That pair of eagles has had this here nest for years 'nd years," whispered Harvey. "Likely the father of one of 'em had it before 'em, for that's the way they do. They pick the best place they can find, and then they stick to it. Look at them bones; they live on the best. I tell you, boys. Lambs, 'nd fawns, 'nd wild turkeys; they know what's good. They don't bother us at the ranch, though, 'cause a calf is just a little too big for 'em to elope with. I dunno as I ought to let you boys go down at that egg. Look at that beak; she might pick your eyes out!"

Jack was trembling all over with excitement. "Oh, Harvey, don't talk that way!" he cried. "I came up here to get that egg, and I'm going to get it. I'll pull my hat over my eyes, and I've got a knife, if she does come at me."

"Well, they 'most always run when you come near 'em," said Harvey, assenting, and he and Jim began to uncoil the rope, and look for a place to attach it. They found a rock round which to make it fast, and a smooth spot over which to lower it. The free end was fastened around Jack's body, and under his shoulders, in a fashion that Harvey directed and that left the arms entirely free.

"Give two pulls when you are ready to come up," said Harvey. "Ready now. One, two, three," and Jack was lowered carefully over the edge, and down, down, slowly and steadily, to the nest.

A swish and whirr of wide wings near him told him that the eagle was off her nest. With a harsh scream, almost like the barking of a dog, she hovered near; but she was evidently frightened too badly to attack this strange intruder. Jack, on his part was too excited to be frightened. He found his feet on the narrow ledge, beside the immense nest,

which looked larger than ever, now that he was close to it. Not a stick in it was less than an inch in diameter, and though it looked like a careless pile of them, yet they were so skilfully interlaced that it was almost as firm as the rock beneath it, into the crevices of which the ends of its foundation sticks were carefully hooked. The hollow of the nest was deep, and close to the rock; three large, oval shaped eggs, yellowish white, mottled with russet brown, lay in it. With a thrill of delight Jack picked one up, and slipped it into the bag he had hung around his waist for the purpose. Should he take another? He had just decided in the affirmative when the scream of the eagle sounded close at his ear, and the great bird, lifted out of her fear by the loss of her eggs, attacked him desperately with wing, claw and beak.

The protecting brim of the hat saved Jack's eyes, but he felt his shoulder bleeding where the terrible beak had struck it. He pulled hard at the rope—once, twice—and then drew his knife. The enraged bird came at him again. Jack struck at her; but she swerved, and the blow missed. Harvey and Jim above, were drawing up the rope with frantic haste, but Jack was still ten feet below the edge. He made another desperate stroke as the eagle's wing struck him at almost stunning blow on the head. The force of it whirled him round, and the keen blade touched, not the eagle, but the side of the rope, cutting two strands of it through.

Jack saw it unravel, and felt suddenly sick with fear. On the one slender strand that remained hung his poor chance of life. "Be careful! I've cut the rope!" he shouted. Would the one strand last, or cut on the edge of the rock? Jack closed his eyes. The eagle screamed and struck at him again, but he did not dare to strike back. Suddenly he heard Jim's voice above him: "All right, Jack; I'm coming down after you. Just wait a minute."

How Jim did it is hard to explain. But it was done with the lariot on Harvey's saddle, somehow.

The first thing Jack said, as Jim caught him round the shoulders and dragged him a great deal farther from the edge than was necessary, was: "Look out; don't break that egg!"—Morning Star.

Another process for the manufacture of peat coal, which, according to its promoters, threatens to revolutionize the world's coal trade, has appeared. The peat is first subjected to a process of dehydration by beating fans, and is then disintegrated electrically, without loss of any of the valuable properties which it possesses. It is then molded and pressed, and is ready for use.