

## For the Boys and Girls

### THE PORCUPINE IN WESTERN CANADA

BY DAN McCOWAN BANFF, ALBERTA.

In Western Canada the rodents or gnawing animals vastly outnumber all other mammals. On the wide prairies the beaver, the muskrat and the "gopher" are to be found in great numbers; in the forests live hosts of squirrels and chipmunks; high on the mountain-side is the sure refuge of the cony and the marmot. Included in the long list of sharp-toothed beasts of this order are many whose habits are quaint and curious, whose manners and customs and traits present to the nature student problems which may only be solved by years of close observation and patient experiment.

#### PERPETUAL ENIGMA.

Outstanding amongst this large family is Spiney the porcupine, a perpetual enigma in himself. His biography might well be bounded with three marks of interrogation—one of them at the beginning and two at the end. The mystery animal of the woods, he is at all times apart and aloof from the wild life in and about his habitat. With apparently no definite aim or purpose in life, the porcupine wanders through the woods at all times and seasons, the while giving voice to his feelings in a succession of grunts, groans and monotonous whines, each one pleasing and melodious as the perpetual plaint of the chronic pessimist. The porcupine has no fear of man and as a rule makes no effort to avoid his presence. His enemies amongst the birds and beasts are but few. With a desire for solitude and seclusion he preserves an armed neutrality towards every creature who respects his wishes and leaves him alone.

#### LACKING IN BEAUTY.

The porcupine is to be found throughout the coniferous forest area of Canada. It is entirely lacking in beauty and grace, having a clumsy shapeless-looking body set upon short stubby legs. In walking the feet are placed flat on the ground in like manner to the raccoon and the bear. When travelling, "Spiney" never changes gear, because he has only one speed and that slow. From the nose to the tip of the tail a full-grown animal measures about three feet and has a weight of from 12 to 20 pounds. When winter is nighing, the members of this family are usually "hog fat" and at such times may scale as high as 40 pounds. The porcupine is of a dull brownish color, shading, in many instances, into a near black. The eyes are small and lustreless, the face dull and unattractive. The front teeth are of a deep orange color, and being long and chisel sharp are well adapted to the tree-gnawing habits of the animal.

#### STRIKING PECULIARITY.

The most striking peculiarity about the porcupine is the specialized development of the under fur into sharp-pointed quills. These quills are white with black tips and the body of the animal is almost entirely covered and protected by them, only the muzzle, the belly and the legs being exposed. Interspersed with, and overlying the quills are long coarse hairs of a pale yellow color. The quills lie flat on the body at normal times, but when the bearer is disturbed or alarmed they are raised by muscular contraction into an almost impenetrable array of bristling dagger points, from one-half inch to over three inches. Those on the tail are shorter but are set more closely. They are so slightly attached that when the points touch and enter the skin of a molesting beast or bird they are at once freed at the base. Each quill is so barbed that, being set in the hide or flesh of another animal, they can only be extracted by the exercise of considerable force. There are close upon a thousand barbs on each quill, as can readily be seen by microscopic examination. If moistened, the barbs curl outwards from the quill stem.

The porcupine can not and therefore does not "throw" its quills. Nor does he curl up into a ball when attacked. His method of defence is to thrust the unprotected snout into a hole or under a log. Then with arched back and with feet firmly set he erects a formidable array of needle-sharp spikes and awaits the onset of his enemy. His weapon of offence is the tail, in very truth a murderous bludgeon. When an assailant ventures within range, this club tail with its myriad stinging thorns swings with an amazing speed and usually "connects." This rapid movement of the tail has probably been responsible for the widespread belief that the porcupine "shoots" its quills.

#### GREAT ARMAMENT.

With such an efficient armament it might reasonably be inferred that the

porcupine is well-nigh invulnerable to attack. Yet he has a few enemies who must be compelled to exercise considerable ingenuity in order to bring about his destruction. Driven by the urge of extreme hunger, the lion, the lynx and the bear will essay to convert "Spiney" into a meal. Eagles on occasion venture to give battle, and even the great horned owl has courage enough to clash with the prickly one when he is to be found in a tree-top.

The black bear is credited with having the power to kill the porcupine by inserting a paw under the head and body of the victim and then flipping him against tree or rock. Evidence regarding this ping-pong performance of Bruin's is somewhat scanty and unreliable. With its usual indifference to danger the wolverine attacks and kills the porcupine, but in so doing suffers more or less serious injury. The one carnivorous animal which has successfully mastered the defence of the porcupine is the fisher or pekan, as he is called in Eastern Canada. Approaching his victim silently and cautiously he, with a dexterous twist of his paw, turns the porcupine over, thereby exposing the throat and the equally unprotected underparts. It is an extraordinary circumstance that the quills of the porcupine, capable of deadly hurt to most creatures, are apparently harmless to the fisher. Quills which are swallowed pass through the intestines without damaging these vital organs. Others which become attached to the skin and flesh of the fisher do not produce the usual inflammation, but in course of time either work out or else become encysted under the hide. So long ago as 1829 Richardson the eminent naturalist who was with Sir John Franklin on the north-west explorations, observed and made note of the fisher's fondness for the flesh of the porcupine.

#### FALLS A VICTIM.

When the careless camper sets the woods alight most of the wild creatures seek safety in flight. The porcupine, being slow and sluggish, has no means of escape and falls a victim to smoke or flame.

The porcupine is destructive to forest growth, feeding as it does on the inner bark of trees, particularly that of the spruce and pine. In obtaining this food it girdles the tree, and in this way is capable of destroying valuable timber. It is fond of hemlock twigs and esteems lily pads a great delicacy. In orchard regions it helps itself to apples and other fruits. In the Rocky Mountains it feeds largely on the leaves and stems of the great willow herb or fire weed.

Possessing an inordinate love for salt, the porcupine does considerable damage around camps in satisfying its craving for this substance. It is quite partial to a meal of harness leather, apparently finding nourishment in the salty grease and oil with which the belts and straps are occasionally anointed.

The family life of the porcupine is somewhat obscure and but little is known concerning its mating habits. The young, born in April or May, are amazingly large and well developed at birth. By reason of his fear-inspiring armament the porcupine is to a great extent diurnal and may often be seen wandering on the forest floor or sunning himself in a lofty tree top. Buoyed up by a multitude of hollow quills he can swim for a long distance without much effort. His favorite sleeping place is in a rock cavity or in a hollow log. With head in and tail out, the slumbering animal is in little danger from a surprise attack and is seldom caught napping.

The economic value of this species is very small, if indeed it has any such value. In the embroidery of coats and moccasins the quills were used by the women of the Indian tribes. Dyed with roots, berries, bark, or lichens, they were worked into many colored patterns which were often pleasing and artistic.

When all has been said and written there still remains the problem of Nature's use and place for this quaint quill-clad creature.

#### Reasons for Growth of Automobile Production.

1. Time-saving is a major factor in modern business.
2. People are tiring of the cities; the car is the real estate insurance of the suburban home.
3. The farmer is insisting on having quick individual transportation between farm and town.
4. The automobile serves the instinctive travel-impulse of a pioneer people.



Probably the most romantic figure in the British political field to-day is Margaret Bondfield, the charming woman who will probably become Minister of Health in the Ramsay MacDonald cabinet should he be called upon to form one.

Miss Bondfield, who is fifty-one years of age, but looks many years younger, is an example of what a woman may attain by the exercise of a combination of brains and charm. She is one of the pioneer women leaders of England, and has invaded domains theretofore denied to women and has excelled in many of them.

Miss Bondfield has a delightful face radiating good will and expressing a rare sweetness of character. She has the unique gift of being able to quote statistics and make them sound like romance. She has magnetic qualities as a speaker and in recent labor gatherings in England has been regarded as the outstanding figure. She speaks in a low musical voice, has never lost control of her voice or her emotions, and has that saving grace—humor, which she instills into awkward situations.



At thirteen she was teaching school, and two years later became a clerk in a dry goods shop and later went into the same work in the British capital, where she became interested in the labor movement and soon demonstrated her organizing ability.

Of recent years she earned the hon-

or of being the first woman to be named to the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress, and is now the president of the General Council of the Congress and is in line for the presidency of the next Trades Union Congress, an honor unique in the history of the labor movement.

For a woman to have reached these official heights is food for thought. The fact that she is loved by all her associates is still more amazing. She had much in common with the wife of Ramsay MacDonald, and the two women were fast friends and co-workers. They possessed the same sweetness and earnest loyalty, and the same ambitions for laboring women and the Labor party to which they were both devoted.

Miss Bondfield's accession to office in historic Westminster will mark an epoch in the history of the women's movement. The pictures above show Miss Bondfield, and also a view of the home of the "Mother of Parliaments," where in the course of history so many precedents have been established for the rest of the democratic world to follow.



When the Ice Breaks.

The boy who knows what to do when the ice breaks may, because of his knowledge, be able to save either his own life or the life of a friend.

The January issue of "The Scout Leader" carries some particularly timely advice to Scoutmasters in connection with training their boys in ice accident prevention, and the current issue of "Boys' Life" gives Boy Scout readers the following simple common-sense directions which should be in the mind of everybody who indulges in winter sports.

Always be prepared to help a person who has broken through or fallen into a hole in the ice. Each Scout should carry a guard-rope while skating. In case of accident the rope end is tied around the waist of the rescuer who, flat on his stomach, latches as close to the edge of the hole as he can. Here, he grasps the wrists of the person in the water while his companion pulls them both out of danger. In case a companion is not present the rescuer holds one end of the rope and throws the other end to the person in the water. If the person is not strong enough to grasp the rope, it is possible to pass one end of the rope around your own body and the other one around a tree on the shore and crawl to the person who has broken through the ice.

There are other methods whereby a skater may be reached who has broken through the ice.

A coat sweater, or shirt may be used when crawling on the ice to make a rescue. Get close enough for the person to grasp the article with which to give him purchase. Slide back as the victim emerges from his icy bath. A flat board is very good to distribute weight and gives the surest kind of a platform on which a person can draw himself to safety. Broken trees and saplings can be thrown to the victim and be so arranged across the hole by himself that he can rest on the sapling and extricate himself from his difficult position. In case you break through and go completely under the ice, open your eyes and look above so that when you come up you can head for the brightest spot of light cast by the break in the ice.

"If you fall in the water, no matter how cold the weather, build a fire or go to some shelter, take off all your clothing and wring it out dry as possible. You will be warmer afterward."

#### Three Awards for Life Saving.

A bulletin issued by Provincial Headquarters of The Boy Scouts Association, Toronto, announces the following life-saving awards to Ontario Scout and Scout leaders:

The Gilt Cross to Scout Alden Morgan, age 13, 1st MacTier Troop, for stopping a runaway horse by climbing out on the shafts until able to reach the reins and thus saving from injury or death two children who were in the wagon.

The Gilt Cross to Assistant Scoutmaster J. S. Richards, age 20, 1st Little Current Troop, for the rescue from drowning of Cecil Hall, who had fallen with his bicycle from a wharf at Little Current.

The Silver Cross to Scout Darrel Allen, age 18, St. George's Troop, Peterborough, for diving from a bridge and attempting to rescue a Miss Gunn from drowning. Allen reached and secured Miss Gunn as she came to the surface after sinking, both were swept away by the strong current, and were unconscious when finally brought ashore by Gordon Thomas.

#### Musicians Are Better Thinkers.

One of the claims made for music is that it quickens the mental processes. This contention is right.

Students of music are invariably better advanced in the thinking line than those who have no interest in musical affairs. Furthermore, our association with musicians has caused us to marvel at the alertness of their minds when applied to problems other than music. At repartee none is quicker than the tongue of the musician. Von Bulow's wit, for example, was instantaneous. His rivals could never get the best of him. Of one of William Sterndale Bennett's compositions he once said: "It is so much like Mendelssohn that one might have thought Sir Julius Benedict had written it." Of Mascagni he said: "He has in his predecessor, Verdi, his own successor, who will live long after him." Once when sailing on an ocean liner he looked longingly at the musicians and remarked: "How lucky those fellows are? They can eat their lunch without music."

Von Bulow was only one of thousands of musicians whose wits have sparkled continuously.

A portion of the old Roman wall of London has recently been uncovered in Houndsditch. It is 8 ft. 9 in. thick, faced with squared stones, and filled with smaller stones, over which cement had been poured.

When someone was complaining of insomnia, an Irishman recommended a sure cure for it. "Go to bed," he said, "an' shlap it off!"

#### Mooring a Dirigible.

The proposal of the U.S. navy to fly to the Pole in the Shenandoah, Uncle Sam's biggest airship, includes the establishment of an air base in Alaska from which the start would be made. It is unlikely that a special hangar for the big ship would be built there, and it is much more probable mooring masts would be utilized to hold the Shenandoah between flights. Such masts already are in use at the Lakehurst, N.J., naval station.

The usual airship mooring mast is about 200 feet high and is of steel, firmly based in concrete. The nose of the ship is made fast by cables to a swivel arrangement set in the head of the mast. This swivel, moving freely, permits the flying craft to swing to the wind, much as a ship swings to its anchor in a tide-way. When the airship is to be moored she noses down toward the mast, drops her cable to the ground, and this in turn is made fast to the cable on the mast swivel. The slack is then taken up by a motor driven winch on the ground.

After being secured to the mast it is found the airship rides better in the wind if ballast is cast out.

#### Being Busy.

When people tell one another how busy they are or have been, although they are likely to lament the "busyness," they usually regard it as creditable. And yet to be busy is not necessarily to be engaged in anything worth while. Being busy and working are by no means synonymous. The disparaging expression "a busybody" arose from a perception of that fact. People who keep themselves pretty constantly occupied with work have no time or inclination for mischief-making, yet people can busy themselves in making mischief. They can busy themselves too in ways that do no special harm to others and that are yet futile and frivolous. A great many people, for example, are busy performing social acts and rites that have no particular value.

Being busy in the sense of being constantly occupied with the little complications in the web of life is a harassing and discouraging form of activity, says a writer in Youth's Companion. Yet nowadays people give more time and effort to the attempt to deal with such complications than ever before—because the complications are more numerous and intricate.

The persons who are busy most of the time on productive, interesting work of some kind, and who do not allow the element of busyness to invade their hours of recreation and relaxation, have a sound philosophy of life and are living in accordance with it.