

DEER HUNTING IN THE CANADIAN FOREST.

MONTREAL, Nov., 5, 1872.

MY DEAR PHIL:

Instead of giving you the promised description of my excursion in the bush last month, I feel almost inclined to give you a sound rating for again disappointing me after so many assurances that you would make one of my party.

Much as I missed you, you have lost more than I.

What more pleasant than to take a passage in one of Allan's steamers from Liverpool to Quebec about the end of August; reach here early in September, after a peep at our thriving city take rail to "The Falls," and return to Montreal by steamer down Lake Ontario and the grand St. Lawrence with its thousand isles and splendid rapids; just in time to accompany me to the Backwoods.

I merely mention these as a sauce to the attractions of the chase. Early in October my party, which consisted of three besides myself, was organised; our friend K—, who as you know is very clever with his pencil, being one of us. It was a lovely morning when we took the Ottawa boat; the foliage was in that glorious state of transition of colour which would well nigh baffle an artist's skill. Were it possible to produce on canvass the effect of dazzling beauty that our Canadian forests display in the fall, you—who have never seen the like—would pronounce it an exaggeration. Lover of the beautiful in nature as I am, my sporting instincts overcame me, and I could not refrain from exclaiming to K—, who was lost in admiration:—"Oh! for a good frost after all the rain we have recently had, then soon will the trees be bare, and there will be less to intercept the thrilling music of the hounds."

"What a Goth you are," this in semi-indignant tones from K—.

At night we disembarked with our camp equipage, provisions for the inner man—not omitting a keg of "Old Rye"—and our four pairs of hounds, which latter seemed thoroughly to understand the nature of the errand on which they were bound.

The next morning an hour was consumed in loading up the waggon with the baggage, and after a hearty (?) breakfast off greasy pork, bad tea, and potatoes, we started from the haunts of men.

I will not run the risk of cooling your ardour by describing minutely the state of the roads, suffice it that near night-fall we accomplished our land-journey without the loss of anything more serious than sundry and frequent strong ejaculations at the condition thereof. They would be more difficult to depict than the foliage; that is if fidelity and not the picturesque was the object sought.

When we made a halt, these same roads had run their course. We were on the banks of a small river, about seventy yards across,—a tributary to the Ottawa—that runs meandering through the very heart of the forest.

Here we found canoes awaiting us; these are hewn out of the solid trunk of the soft maple, and are much better for hunting in smooth water than bark canoes, being more noiseless and less influenced by wind. Our men who were with us, had taken the wise precaution to be provided with a number of boards, after placing three canoes abreast, about one foot apart, we laid the boards across them, and then proceeded to load up on the top. When this was accomplished we had as steady a water conveyance as you could desire, carrying men, dogs, and baggage in the greatest safety. Our only concern was that as the day-light was departing, the river was full of "snags" (advertisements would say replete with), and we had still ten miles to go, we might come foul of one of these said snags, and thus have our aquatic vehicle parted, and thereby have to take a cold bath against our consent.

Fortunately, however, everything went on swimmingly, and we reached our camping ground about ten p.m.

The first operation was to make a roaring fire, which at last we succeeded in doing, though with much difficulty as everything was saturated with water. Much time did not elapse before some good strong poles were cut for the tents; as these were being pitched, tea, biscuits and a cold boiled round of beef was being prepared.

Never was a repast more enjoyed, nor justice to it dealt out more liberally, as we had not broken our fast since morning.

The keg of "Old Rye" was tapped, and all the thirsty and weary souls needed no pressing to "mop up." I must tell you how we make our beds: for each one we cut four posts with a fork at the top, and drive these firmly into the ground covering a space of about 6 ft. 6 in. x 2 ft. 6 in., then we cut two poles to go lengthways and two short ones as braces. The long ones we lay in the forks of the posts, and the short ones we lay across, then these are securely fastened at each corner with twine. Having done thus much we have a piece of canvass about 6 ft. x 2 ft. perforated at the sides and ends with eyelets 6 in. apart, and this we lace with cord to the poles quite tight. This, when properly made, is one of the most comfortable beds you can possibly sleep on. They proved so that night, no lullaby was needed. The next day was consumed in "putting things to rights" and making a warm camp for the dogs. In the evening we discussed some "hot stuff," and planned the morrow's campaign.

If you have any friend suffering from dyspepsia send him out to me, and let me employ him to "put out the dogs." After climbing fallen trees, wading through swamps, and threading his way through endless masses of tangled twigs for four or five miles of dense forest, if he would not eat old boots, for lack of something more tempting, I would eat him. It will beat hollow all the Doctor's nostrums in creation, as our Yankee friends would sweepingly remark. Well, for this work we have men hired for the purpose. I have described the river as meandering, it twists and twines like a snake. You will remember the words of the Psalmist: "As pants the hart for cooling streams;" the same words apply to the red deer of Canada. "When heated in the chase" they seek the water and endeavour to throw the hounds off their track. This they often accomplish, but we hunters strive to circumvent their little game, by stationing a canoe freighted with a rifle and some one to pull the trigger, at some point on the river, in the vicinity of which the deer is most likely to cross, thus our three canoes, or "watches," as we call them, will not unfrequently keep sentry over six or eight miles.

Our friend K— preferred taking a ramble with his sketch book instead of a rifle, and was lucky enough to witness a bit of sport of which he has made an excellent drawing. I had him waiting for a couple of hours since day-break on my watch in a canoe, almost fearing the dogs had not got a start, when in the dim distance I heard the long note of a hound. Nearer and nearer it came, until the echoes and his voice were almost blended; then, oh! perdition! the sound grew fainter and more faint, the deer had wheeled and was heading away on the ridge. "He's gone up," I exclaimed to Harry (my man in the stern) "let us paddle on as fast as we can." The water flew by us, or rather, we sped through the water, and the perspiration flowed from each pore as we strained every muscle; two miles had we gone at this killing pace, when, by Jupiter! he wheeled again, and down he headed, the hound giving magnificent music all the time. We followed—going over the same course, exerting ourselves as though our future bliss depended on the result, and just as a bend in the river intercepted our view, I heard the dog close to the bank down below us.

"The deer is in the water," says Harry, and he was too; in another moment we rounded the point and saw a splendid stag nearly across, on the other side of the river, about a hundred yards down.

"Steady, Harry! Steady, my boy, wait till he is rising out of the water." Bang!! his neck is broken, and he tumbles head over heels into the water again. Hurrah, boys!! We soon had him by the horns and were doing our best to haul him up the bank, no easy matter—250 lbs. of venison—especially up an incline of a moist clay. The knife did its work, and there lay as noble a deer, with as fine a head of antlers, as ever trod the forest.

"Now Harry, my boy, where's the flask?" That was soon found, and our friend K—, who had witnessed the death from the other side of the river, was speedily paddled across, and joined in the toast of "Death to the deer!" Of course he meant at the hands of sportsmen, and not at the hands of a set of ruffians who kill deer in season and out of season as they would kill pigs, to sell their carcasses.

Our game laws on paper are good; the penalties are too light, and unfortunately the means to enforce them are feeble. In Ontario, Deer, Moose, and Cariboo can be shot from September 1 to December 19; in Quebec, from September 1 to February 1.

More deer are killed by the lumbermen on the "Crust," than by the rifle, and that at a time when the skin is poor and the flesh worse. Were the railroad companies and the steamboats prohibited from carrying game during the close season it would do much to check this wholesale and desultory slaughter. I wish some influential member of our Legislative Assembly would take this matter up and deal with it as it deserves to be dealt with—with energy and determination. We shall know the value of our game when it is exterminated.

All this *par parenthèse*.

There are two other modes in vogue of hunting the red deer: One on the "Runways," the other by stalking. The latter plan is generally adopted when the snow has fallen, so that the track may be followed by the eye. Softly must you creep along, and many a weary mile may you have to trudge before you get a shot, and then if successful at last, it is no easy undertaking to bring your game out to the "clearing."

K— has given you a very spirited drawing of a buck killed on a runway by S—. The dogs were put out one morning as usual. K— said he would go—sketch-book, and all with S—. Two canoes were at their stations, and S— concealed himself behind a big tree, about thirty yards from a runway, or deer path, and about a mile and a half from the river. Some of the same episodes transpired as in the other hunt I have described, when presently his stagship came bounding full well along his forest road, with the hounds in full cry, not more than five hundred yards in his rear. The click of the cocks of S—'s double barrel arrested his attention for an instant, in another ball pierced his heart.

S— made a capital shot, and I am delighted he did. He is a thorough sportsman, as steady as a tree, and can hold his rifle straight—which is saying much—but he is most profoundly unlucky, he gets so few chances.

Luck is very capricious: there is luck in sport, as there is in the serious matters of every day life; in both cases the ability to take advantage of the chances that present themselves is necessary. Halt the world is cursing its luck, when, in truth, either stupidity or want of skill is at the bottom of the trouble.

There is no need for me to recount the doings of each day; you must be content to know that our three rifles (K— never shot) brought down fifteen head, and this during a period when rain fell (a most unusual thing in October) eighteen hours out of twenty-four.

If you come out next Fall bring with you warm flannels, a suit of dark grey tweed, and a double barrel breech loading rifle, central fire, about .44 calibre conical ball—double grip lever action is the best.

If you shoot well, as I believe you do, you do not require a larger ball. I cannot see the utility of saving your cook trouble—for which she will not thank you—by making mince-meat of your venison before you skin it.

A double barrel is by far the best for runaway hunting. For stalking or shooting from a canoe there is a very excellent American rifle (you had better buy one here when you come) made by Smith & Wesson; it will shoot either a rim cutting or central fire cartridge, by the simple adjustment of a very ingenious mechanical contrivance on the hammer. It is very accurate, has a long range, and is rapidly loaded; in the hands of a good marksman it is the best piece I have seen, and is very cheap, only some £9 or £10 sterling; in England such a piece would cost double that amount.

It is odd that England can defy the world in the construction of shot guns, but our cousins across the "line" can "whip" all others in the manufacture of rifles—price considered.

Now, my dear Phil., after this long effusion I have nothing more to say, except that I shall strike you off the list of my sporting friends (you having plenty of time and ample means) if you do not join my Deer Hunt next Fall.

Ever yours sincerely,

B. F. T.

P. S.—Since putting down my pen, I have been cleaning my rifle, and I find it is made by Frank Wesson, not Smith & Wesson: the latter only make revolvers, and splendid weapons they are.

B. F. T.

(Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.)

THE MIDNIGHT MASS.

BY JOHN LESPERANCE.

It was Christmas Eve. I was sitting in my room, at the St. Lawrence Hall, listlessly smoking a cigar, and feeling very lonesome. A stranger in a strange land, my mind reverted sadly to the scenes of cheer I had left behind me, on the banks of the Mississippi—the roysterings, meetings, eggnogg, and singing of the *Salvete dilectissimi*. I heard the great bells of Notre Dame echoing the Angels' glad tidings to the earth, but their festal music, instead of finding an echo in my heart, only served to make my nostalgia more real and burdensome.

I was in the deepest of my brown study, the fire in my grate was smouldering, and the light of my cigar dying out, when a boisterous Canadian friend came in, stamping, and rubbing his hands.

"What are you doing here?" he cried.

"Moping."

"Bah! What do you intend doing with yourself to-night?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? That will never do. I have come for you. We must be up to something. What do you say to hearing Midnight Mass?"

I answered that I had no taste for the devotion.

"O, not in Montreal," pursued my friend; "we shall go into the country—Terrebonne, for example. It is only fifteen miles off; the weather is delightful, there is a fine moonlight; after the mass we shall have a nice luncheon at the best village tavern, and, altogether, I promise you a good time. Come."

There was a smack of adventure in this proposal which roused me from my lethargy. I accepted my friend's offer. An hour later, just as the Post Office clock pointed to ten o'clock, we set out in one of Martin's best sleighs.

I.

Up St. Lawrence Street at a smart trot. Then out into the lonely spaces leading to the Ottawa. The wind blew more keenly, and the cold increased, but we soon reached the pleasant tavern at the Sault, and there had our first "nip." None of your epicene Martell, or meretricious Old Tom, on such a night as this, but a goodly draught of Molson's stiffest high wines, clear as the crystal of the rock, and sweet as the hydromel of gods. Leaving the covered bridge on our right, and thus saving a toll, we crossed the river on the ice, scaled the steep sides of the Ecorts and struck the main road direct to Terrebonne. The scene here was grandiose, such as can be witnessed only in boreal climates. Montreal mountain, looming gigantic in the back ground, cast long shadows over the snowy reaches, and the round moon, doubled in size by the vapours which encircled it, hung low, like Elaine's magic shield, on the broad surface of the Rivière des Prairies. The air, too, was full of strange rumours. There were shrill cries, as of winter birds calling from their eyries in the firs, low monotonous as of niveids making love under the cliffs, loud explosions of air-holes bursting near the banks, and the weird music of the telegraph wires, as full and enharmonic as that of a Cathedral organ. To all these sounds of Nature we added our rollicking songs. My friend, accompanied by the driver, went through the whole repertory of native chansons, from the plaintive "*Le Canadien Errant*," to the wild and rather questionable "*Mariens-nous tout dret, tout dret*." I enjoyed all these things very much. Ensnoring myself still more deeply in my furs, I took in the novelty of the scene, compared it with previous experiences of travel, and congratulated myself on having accepted my friend's invitation.

Suddenly, at a bend of the road, our driver pulled up his horses and turned round to us inquiringly.

"Did you hear?" said he.

We answered that we had heard nothing particular.

He continued to advance, but on the principle that a slight sound or even a deep silence will check the loudest noise, he ceased his singing and continued to listen.

"I heard it again," he said, after a time.

"I think I hear something too," said my friend.

We stopped the sleigh completely, and bent over to hearken. Presently we all three distinctly heard a female voice singing the following words:

"Qui passe par ce chemin si tard,
Compagnons de la Majolaine?
Qui passe par ce chemin si tard,
Toujours gai?"

"Hallo!" said I, sitting up. "These are strange words, but I have heard them before."

"Yes," answered my friend, laughing, "it is the song which Rigaud sang to Cavalletto in the prison of Marseilles. But to us, in Canada, it is well known, and has generally a superstitious meaning. It is the song of high-way robbers, or of the dead riding in the night air to summon belated travellers to join them in the other world."

I smiled; our driver shivered. Even my friend looked solemn, spite of his words of banter.

"Drive on," I said, "we shall be late for the mass."

The horses seemed reluctant to start. They snorted, fell back upon their haunches, pricked up their ears, and gave the other usual signs of instinctive terror.

"Look ahead," said the driver, pointing with his whip. Sure enough, under a clump of trees by the roadside were a couple of dark objects distinctly visible in the moonlight. My companions hardly knew what to make of them, but I thought I distinguished a horse and sleigh struggling in a snow drit, and two figures standing alongside. However, I lost no time in discussing the matter, and urged the driver to push on. Working up all his courage, he snapped his whip, gave a loud cry, the horses sprang forward at the top of their speed, and before any of us sufficiently recovered his wits, we had passed the suspicious objects, and were far on our way. A silvery laugh greeted our hasty passage, and I caught the words:—

"Toujours gai!"

Turning in my seat, and waving my hand in response, I shouted:

"Toujours gai!"

II.

We reached Terrebonne on the stroke of twelve. The little church, lighted from floor to dome, flashed out upon the night