

THE ARCHDEACON'S FIRE

By ARTHUR HEMING. Illustrated by the Author

"YES, sir, it's true; fire attracts 'em. Why, I've knowed 'em come from miles round when they caught a glimpse of it, an' as long as there's danger o' white bears bein' round you'll never again find old Billy Brass tryin' to sleep beside a big fire. No, sir, not even if His Royal Highness the Commissioner or His Lordship the Bishop gives the word."

All day the going had been hard, so we stopped a little before dusk to make our camp. While we were shovelling away the snow with our snowshoes, the packet from Fort Determination hove in sight. It was in charge of Standing Wolf and a half-breed. They halted their dogs, unharnessed them beside our sleds and prepared to spend the night with us. After supper we all squatted before the huge fire—some fifteen feet in length—each with the hood of his capote drawn over his head to protect his neck from the biting cold that forever hovered among the dancing shadows. Whilst pipes were busily going the conversation had as usual, drifted upon hunting stories. When old Billy Brass introduced the subject of polar bears and the power of fire to attract them, we listened attentively in the hope of his continuing; but he sat there drawing slowly upon his pipe with apparently no intention of adding a single word to what he had already said. Lest something interesting should be lost, I ventured:

"Was it the Bishop or the Commissioner that made the trouble?"

"No, sir, neither; 'twas the Archdeacon," replied the old man as he withdrew his pipe and rubbed his smarting eyes clear of the smoke from the blazing logs. Taking a few short draws at the tobacco, he continued:

"There was three of us, me an' Archdeacon Lofty an' Captin Hawser, who was commandin' one of the Company's steamers that was a goin' to winter in Hudson Bay. It happened in September. The three of us was hoofin' it along the great, barren shore o' the bay. In some places the shore was that flat that every time the tide came in she flooded 'bout all the country we could see, an' we had a devil of a time tryin' to keep clear o' the mud. We had a few dogs along to help pack our beddin', but, nevertheless, it was hard work; for we was carryin' most of our outfit on our backs.

"One evenin' just before sundown we stumbled upon a lot o' driftwood scattered all about the flats. As so much wood was lyin' around handy, we decided to spend the night on a little knoll that rose above high-water mark. For the last few days we had seen so little wood that any of our fires could have been built in a hat. But that night the sight o' so much wood fairly set the Archdeacon crazy with delight, an' nothin' would do but we must have a great, roarin' fire to sleep by. I would have enjoyed a good warmin' as well as any one, but I was mighty leary about havin' a big fire. So I cautioned the Archdeacon not to use much wood as there was likely to be bears about, an' that no matter how far off they was, if they saw that fire they would make for it—even if they was five or six miles out on the ice floes. He wouldn't listen to me. The Captin backed him up, an' they both set to an' built a fire as big as a tepee.

"We was pretty well tuckered out from the day's walkin'. So after supper we dried our moccasins an' was about to turn in early when—lo an' behold! the Archdeacon got up an' piled more wood upon the fire. That made me mad; for unless he was huntin' for trouble he couldn't a done a thing more foolish, an' I says somethin' to that effect. He comes back at me as though I was afraid o' me own shadow, an' says:

"'Billy Brass, I'm sapisred that a man like you doesn't put more faith in prayin' an' trustin' hisself in the hands o' the Almighty.'

"I was so hot over the foolishness of havin' such a big fire that I ups an' says:

"'That may be all right for you, sir, but I prefer to use my wits first, an' trust in Providence afterwards.'

"Nothin' more was said, an' we all turns in. I didn't like the idea of every one goin' to sleep with

a fire so big that it was showin' itself for miles aroun', so I kep' myself awake. I wasn't exactly thinkin' that somethin' really serious was goin' to happen, but I was just wishin' it would, just to teach the Archdeacon a lesson. As time went on I must have done a little dozin'; for when I looks up at the Dipper again, I learns from its angle with the North Star that it was already after midnight. An'—would you believe it?—that fire was still blazin' away nearly as big as ever. The heat seemed to make

a single glance behind just to see which was gainin'. It was a sure case of life or death, but principally death; an' you can depend on it we wasn't takin' any chances.

"Me an' the Captin was crowdin' so close upon the Archdeacon's heels that in his terror lest we should pass him by he ups an' sets the pace at such a tremendous speed that the whole three of us actually catches up to the bear without the brute's knowin' it. If it hadn't been for the Archdeacon steppin' on the sole of the bear's up-turned left hind foot as the hungry beast was gallopin' round the fire, we'd have been runnin' a good deal longer.

"Well, sir, if you had just seen how foolish that bear looked when he discovered that we was chasin' him instead of him chasin' us, you'd have died laughin'. Why, he was the most bewildered an' crest-fallen animal I ever did see. But he soon regained his wits an'—evidently calculatin' that his only salvation layed in his overhaulin' us—lit out at a sapisrin' gait in a grand effort to leave us far enough behind for him to catch up to us. But it didn't work; for by that time we had all got our second wind an' he soon realised that we was determined not to be overhauled from the rear. So he set to ponderin' what was really the best thing for him to do; an' then he did it.

"You must understand that we was so close upon his heels that there wasn't room for him to stop an' turn around without us all fallin' on top of him. So what do you think the cunnin' brute did? Why, he just hauled off an' kicked out behind with his right hind foot, an' hit the Archdeacon a smashin' blow square on his stomach, an' knocked him bang against the Captin an' the Captin against me an' me against the dogs; an' we all went down in a heap beside the fire.

"Well, sir, that old brute had put so much glad an' earnest energy into its kick that it knocked the wind plum out of every one of us, an' for the next few seconds there was a mess of arms an' legs an' tails frantically tryin' to disentangle themselves. But, as good luck would have it, I went down upon the gun. As I rose to my feet, I slipped a cap on the nipple just as the bear comes chargin' around the fire facin' us. I ups an' lets him have it full in the mouth. The shot nearly stunned him. While he clawin' the pain in his

face, I had time to re-load, an' lets him have it behind the ear, an' he drops dead without a whimper.

"Then,—would you believe it?—the Archdeacon goes up to the shaggy carcass, puts his foot on the bear's head, an' stands there lookin' for all the world like British Columbia discoverin' America, an' says:

"'There, now, Billy Brass, I hope you have learned a lesson. Next time you will know where to place your trust.'

"Well, sir, the way he was lettin' on that he had saved the whole outfit made me mad. So I ups an' says:

"'Yes, sir, an' if I hadn't put me trust in me gun, there would have been another Archdeacon in heaven.'

The Judge and the Picture

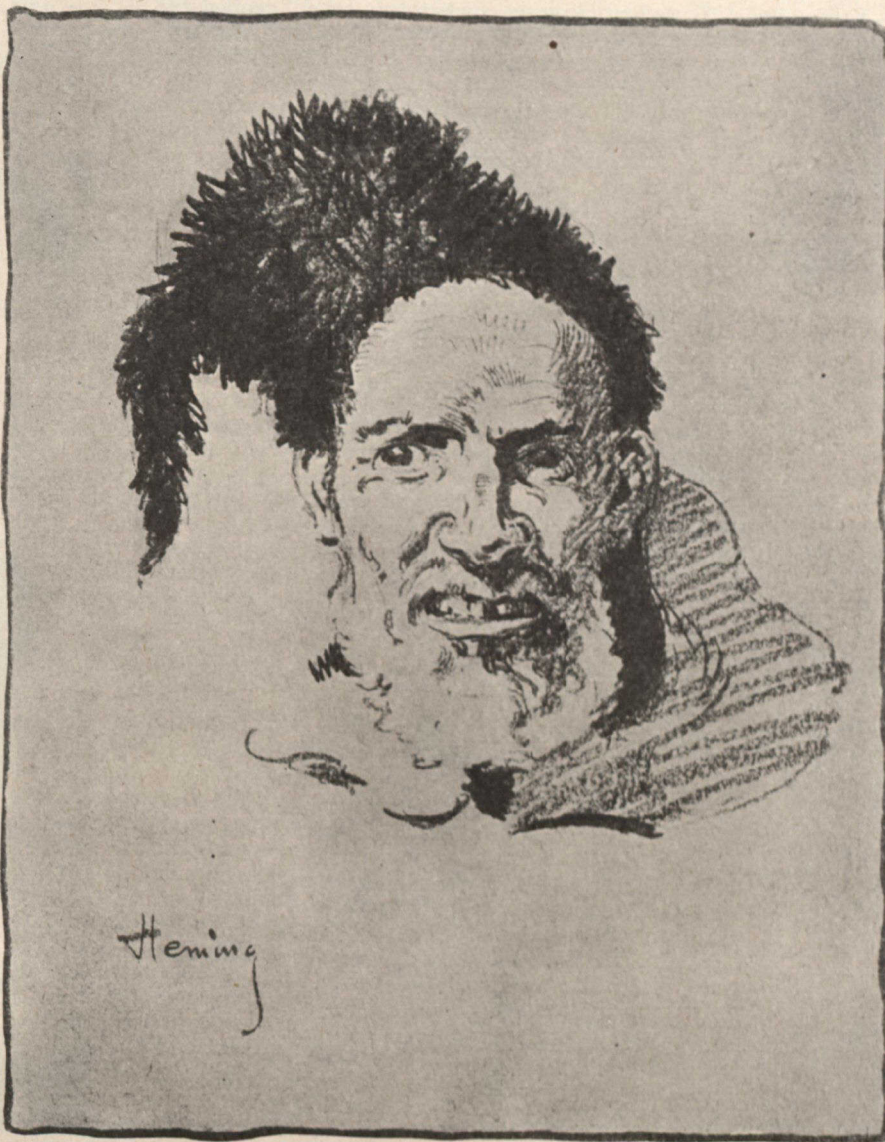
AN eminent Canadian chief justice who used to be equally prominent in statesmanship was busy trying to get his bearings in an art gallery.

"Now, Mr. A.," he said, energetically waving his gloves at a fantastic river picture by an English artist, "I'm convinced that this is a lovely picture. Now, I wish you would tell me why it is so."

"Well, I'm not technically capable of that, Judge, but I'll tell you—here comes an artist; I'll get him to enlighten us."

Said artist is duly guided to the Bench; same question asked; artist technically hesitates—not feeling sure the picture was as fine as the Judge thought. Another artist is introduced; and he more plausibly set forth the claims of the picture.

"Oh," said the Bench, when the disquisition was done, "I think if the name of the firm who loaned that picture were painted across that bridge, it would be a real masterpiece."



"Billy Brass."

Drawn by Arthur Heming.

me drowsy; for I began to doze once more. All at once I heard the dogs blowin' so hard—

"Blowing?"

"Yes, that's right; they were blowin'; for 'geddies' don't bark like other dogs when they're frightened. Well, as I was sayin', they were blowin' so hard that my hair nearly stood on end. Like a shot, I throws off me blanket an' jumps to me feet; for I knowed what was comin'. The Captin an' the Archdeacon heard them too, an' we all grabbed at once for the only gun, a single-barrelled muzzle-loader.

"As ill luck would have it, the Archdeacon was nearest to that gun an' grabbed it, an' by the time we was straightened up we sees a great, big white bear rushin' at us. Quick as thought the Archdeacon points the gun at the bear an' pulls the trigger, but the hammer only snaps upon the bare nipple; for the cap had tumbled off in the scramble. There was no time for re-cappin'; so, bein' the nearest to the chargin' bear, the Archdeacon just drops the old gun an' runs for dear life around that fire with me an' the Captin followin' close behind him.

"When I seen the way the Archdeacon an' the Captin went a sailin' round that fire, it fairly took me breath away; for somehow I never had any idea that them two old cripples had so much speed left in 'em. An' you can bet it kep' me unusually busy bringin' up the rear; an', anyway, the feelin' that the bear was forever snappin' at me coat-tails kep' me from takin' things too easy.

"Well, we tore round an' round an' round that fire so dang many times that we was not only rapidly losin' our wind but we was beginnin' to get dizzy into the bargain. All the time we could hear the great beast thunderin' after us, yet we daren't slacken our pace; no, sir, not even enough to take