

I could have sat on a log and bellowed, but I was so far into the bush that I'd never have found my way out till morning. I clearly remember, however, that when all of a sudden I landed in a large frog-hole at the base of a wind-blown tree I clambered out and sat on the edge—and, oh, how I abused that gang, in language that never was heard within a mile of any class meeting. And the katydids chirped away as though it didn't matter whether I was lost, strayed or stolen.

I got up to listen. The crackling was done. The light was swallowed. The dog no longer barked. The bush was as silent as a cave except for the katydid.

"By gosh! They've got to the tree," I whimpered. "I guess the only way is to pretend I'm a coon and climb one myself, before they'll ever find me."

Which of course was very absurd, because no dog ever tracked a two-legged coon.

Pretty soon I heard the far-off tap of an axe. They had begun to chop down the coon elm. My only fear was that they might get it down and start off again before I caught up.

No, that wasn't my only fear. There came a skin-creeping notion over me that they might not, after all, capture that coon. The beast might escape from the tree into another one, might come clawing down in the dark while the gang chopped away at the elm, and for all I could tell might come lickety-split over in my direction. In fact, who could tell whether at that very moment some malignant coon, knowing that I was one of the gang, was not glaring down at me from the lower limbs of some tree and any moment might spring on me?

I knew now quite clearly that a coon was something akin to a wildcat, because it clomb trees and went out at nights. I remembered David Livingstone and the lions and shivered in my boots as I felt coming through my soul the old missionary hymn, "From Greenland's icy mountains." I gazed timidly up at the dark wilderness of the mighty trees to imagine I could detect some malevolent pair of green eyes blazing down at me. But I saw none.

Thus far, so good. I was safe at present. And if I could summon up enough nerve to trail the gang without getting lost I could be as safe as any of them.

FOR a while I tried to do this. But I found that the tap of the axe is a hard thing to locate in the bush. You never can tell whether what you hear first is the axe or the echo; and the echo never comes from the same place as the axe. As for the lantern the leaves and the limbs were so thick and the gang were so far away that I couldn't see it at all.

No, I was in the pitch-plum dark; and I was alone.

How long I sat on the next log I settled down on I never knew. But pretty soon I heard a crack like a gun going off. Then the dog broke loose into a frightful racket. How I admired the nerve of that dog! He yelped and squealed and whistled. The axe went again. The great tree cracked some more. I stood up leaning on a large elm to listen. The top of the bush seemed to be shaken as by a great wind coming up from somewhere. There was a sound of terrible struggling. What it was I scarcely knew. I understand now that it was just the top of that coon elm clutching at the trees around it in the dark and trying to hold itself up.

All of a sudden the tumult became unspeakably exciting. Half the trees in that part of the bush seemed to be breaking at once. The next thing I clearly knew there was a final smash, a terrific, thundering thud, and after that a sort of silence in which the yelp of the dog let loose was the size of a mouse squeaking. I heard some one yell, "Sikim boy! Fetch 'im out o' that! Go after 'im you—something or other. And I could picture at once the most awful scrimmage ever seen in that part of the world.



After five minutes or so of this there came a real silence. I seemed to hear a low bumble of talk. Then at intervals only the casual crackling of limbs. "I wonder—if they miss me?" I said to myself.

Probably not. They were too busy skinning the carcass to notice that I wasn't along. Jumbo would tell them that I had gone back home from the edge of the corn when he took the lantern. Which as I found out afterwards was just what he did tell them. Anyway, not a man-jack so much as hollered Wuhoo! after me; and I hadn't nerve enough to utter my soul in so much as Boo! to make the gang know I was somewhere in the deep bosom of that swamp-elm forest, and hadn't the feeblest sort of notion how to get out except to follow the noise.

It was now getting on towards midnight. The bush had that settled-down feeling that a house and a street get about one a.m. It was uncanny. I could hear the gang trailing off in some direction or other, just which or where I had no idea, for the moon was under the clouds and the best I could do was to follow that noise. I supposed the gang were now on the way home with the skin of the coon.

I supposed wrong. A coon hunt isn't that kind. My next tramp, stopping every little while to make sure of the noise ahead, lasted what seemed the best part of an hour.

Then the crackling stopped. The dog began to bark just as he had done before. After about ten minutes more of the bush-crackling there was a dead stillness. I heard somebody swear at the dog. He retired.

Then, to my profound discouragement, the axe began to whack again. I settled down to wonder why. Had they decided to get two coons? Very likely. That gang never knew when it was time to go home.

As near as I could figure it out the same thing went on that I had heard before. Away past midnight, in the heart of a bush that somebody owned, they sent down another thundering big tree; same noise, same excitement, same everything—plus a kind of diabolical scrimmage that I don't remember happening in the first case.

Then the gang mused again. So did I. Following the noise led me right up to this second tree. There it was, a great green-smelling monster of an elm,



its top a jungle, its trunk almost as high as my chin, and the stump a great scraggy, splintered thing that I didn't dare stop to investigate.

I was too scared. I left that tree without waiting to see if there was any coon carcass lying about. I blundered on and on in the dark, by a sort of instinct following the noises of the gang. Till presently the moon came out, and I found myself on the edge of a clearing. Here was a snake-rail fence. I climbed up and thanked the Lord. Whose fence it was I had no idea, but yonder was a lane. I pulled myself together wet as a water-rat, and got to the lane like one walking in his sleep. It was Blindey's lane. Yonder was the barn. My legs walked when all the rest of me seemed to be asleep. When I got to the barnyard there was no sign of the gang or the dog. Every house in the settlement had gone to sleep hours ago. I crawled to the hay barn, knowing that the gang were all in the hay-mow fast asleep. Carefully I opened the door, letting in a flood of moonlight. Up aloft I could hear three men snoring, and one of them was Jumbo.

But where were the coonskins? Poking about among the hay on the floor I roused up the old dog. He growled savagely. "Lie down!" I said. "I don't want your skins."

Then I looked again. Fair in the full light of the moon I saw a dark object close to the dog. There was a tail plainly visible; a little tail with rings in it.

"Guess they only got one skin and it's rolled up," says I to myself.

I stooped down to feel it. I picked up the bundle.



And that old dog could have knocked me over with his tail. All it was—was a little sharp-nosed animal weighing about twenty pounds.

"Oh, lord!" I gasped.

That was the last I can remember till somebody prodded me up in the morning on the hay to feed the horses.

The Poet--and the Man

A Contrast Between Two Kinds of Modern Writers

Here are some contrasts in modern poets. Perhaps it is unfair to do it, but it is worth risking. On the one hand take Corporal Joseph Lee's "Ballads of Battle" (Gundy), and on the other hand take a volume labelled "Some Imagist Poets, 1916" (Houghton Mifflin Company). The former book is old-fashioned in form but vigorous and blunt in matter. The latter is delicate, subtle, exquisite and perhaps more beautiful. It is interesting to compare the two, not as literature, but as examples of two types of mind: the fighting man's, and the professional poet's.

Take first this of Richard Aldington in "Some Imagist Poets, 1916." It is called "People":

"Why should you try to crush me?
Am I so Christ-like?

"You beat against me,
Immense waves, filthy with refuse.
I am the last upright of a smashed breakwater,
But you shall not crush me
Though you bury me in foaming slime
And hiss your hatred about me.

"You break over me, cover me;
I shudder at the contact;
Yet I pierce through you
And stand up, torn, dripping, shaken,
But whole and fierce."

Observe the almost Nietzschean egotism of this stuff. Note its "aristocratic" extravagance. Then observe the detached style of "The Drum":

"Come!
Says the drum;
Though graves be hollow
Yet follow, follow:

Come!
Says the drum.

"Life!
Shrills the fife,
Is in strife—
Leave love and wife:
Come!
Says the drum.

"Ripe!
Screams the pipe,
Is the field—
Swords and not sickles wield:
Come!
Says the drum.

"The drum
Says come!
Though graves be hollow,
Yet follow, follow:
Come!
Says the drum."