

## THE BATTLE OF THE WOLVES.

Taken from the Norwegian of Jacob Bull.

My father was a minister in the small parish of Upper Rendale, in Norway. When we first settled at Upper Rendale the parsonage had been uninhabited for years by wolves. The old fence that had once protected the dog kennel had fallen to decay, and it had not been thought worth while to have it replaced.

We had two dogs at the parsonage—Ajax and Hector. Ajax was a common labrador, white and black saddle. He was medium sized and the most sprightly animal I have ever known.

We snail hounds had many a merry tussle with him. Often when he had bounded far beyond us to fetch a ball or stick one of us had cast he would lunge, his head between his jaws, his eyes beaming with roguishness, to wait until we caught up to him. As soon as we were near enough to touch him he would dart nimbly away, and so he would keep it up until we dropped down, unable to make another leap. Then he would lie flat on the ground with us, burling over his snout. He was never known to nip or maul at us, no matter how rough he might be.

He flew at every dog, large or small, that appeared on the road. Swift as lightning, with jaws that gripped like a vice and with an indomitable will, he usually came off victorious; when he did get into a pinch Hector came growling to his rescue, and that settled the matter.

Hector was a large, yellow St. Bernard, of the long-haired kind. We children rode him, drove him and did pretty much as we pleased with him. He followed us like a shadow. The approach of strangers was usually announced by him with a few puff bars, and then he permitted Ajax to furnish the rest of the music. Smaller dogs than himself Hector never harmed, and larger ones there were not for miles around. For Ajax he cherished a faithful, patient friendship. At night Ajax kept in the dog kennel, while Hector kept guard outside.

One cold, starlit evening in February, 1886, my brother and I, two small boys, were coasting on the hill north of the parsonage, our pointed caps drawn down over our ears, our fingers protected by these woolen mittens. The crisp snow crackled and groaned under our heels as we went up the hill, and shrieked beneath the steel runners of our sledges as we made our daring flights downward. Shapely defined shadows were cast on the snow by the moon, and Hector and Ajax, our constant companions, looked with intelligent eyes on the fairland scene about us.

From the parsonage woodshed stole the head glow of the pine torch. The steady rattle of chopping there gave us that reassuring sense of security the nervous

of people always brings. Otherwise, the surrounding stillness was undisturbed save by the occasional growling of some heavily laden vehicle on the road or the slamming of a door in the distance. Suddenly my brother seized my arm.

"Hark!" whispered he.

"THE WOLVES! THE WOLVES!" From the thicket above us a long, hungry howl was ringing through the night air. It was promptly answered from a point still further up the slope, and presently from the opposite side of the valley. Throwing back his head, Hector listened intently. Ajax bristled and growled. We boys knew the sound and shuddered.

"Let's go home," said my brother, lashing our sleds together.

We were on our way down the hill when some one called us from the parsonage.

At the door father was waiting for us. He patting Hector's head, helped us boys put up our sleds and back off the snow, and then hurried us into the house.

"The wolves are about," he said quietly to mother, as he took up his paper.

She seemed uneasy and questioned us children pretty closely. A series of wolf stories followed, one of them about a man who had a narrow escape from a wolf which had sprung at him one dark night on the public highway.

"You see, children, you cannot be too careful," said mother, as she rang the bell for the maid to bring in supper.

While we were still at the table, Ole Johnson, one of the farm hands, came in from the woodshed and stood in the doorway shivering.

"It might be well to keep the dogs indoors to-night," said he.

"Have you seen any wolves?" asked father.

"No, but I heard them a while ago," replied Ole.

"Take Ajax into the servants' hall," said mother, "and Hector may sleep in the nursery."

To have Hector in our room seemed to us boys the safest, most delightful thing imaginable. We were quite sure he was the strongest dog in the world, and could dispose of twenty, aye, a hundred wolves. As we went up to bed, however, our courage was somewhat shaken by the distant howling we heard, and when Hector came upstairs with Marit, the nursemaid, we screamed aloud with fright. We actually thought of the wolf had broken in.

Long after we had crept into bed we lay shivering with cold and dread, until finally the warmth of the fire Marit had kindled pervaded the room, and the crackling flames mingled with Hector's heavy breathing lulled us to rest.

How late it was when I started up in a panic of terror I cannot say. A confused blending of snarling and howling filled the air, and on the window was plainly outlined the huge dark head of some animal with wide open jaws.

Clapping my hands over my eyes I

shrieked out. Marit was roused by my cry, and coming to my bedside asked drowsily what was the matter.

HELP FOR AJAX.

"Look!" I cried, pointing. At this moment Hector, for it was his head I had seen, barked loudly, and standing on his hind legs with his fore-paws on the window sill, made a desperate effort to see through the frost painted glass.

Moving toward the window, Marit cleared a space and stood peering out into the night. In an instant I was at her side, barefoot and trembling. To my dying day I shall never forget the sight we saw.

In an open space on the hillside, north of the parsonage, a dark mass was writhing and tossing on the snow amid screams and howls that rent the air like the roar of a distant waterfall.

"Wolves!" murmured Marit, grasping my arm.

Just then mother opened the door leading into the hall, and Hector, darting past her, sprang down the steps and was only stopped by the front door.

Mother gave orders to put the children's clothes on, and it was not long before every one in the house was dressed and at the window commanding a view of the struggle.

Famous for all time in the parish was that battle fought between six or seven wolves and the fiercest dogs in the vicinity. Long drawn howls, shrill, excited yelps and smothered groans woke the echoes of the night. I quivered in every limb as I watched the thrilling spectacle presented by the strong, gaunt wolves contending with the small dogs that sprang into the air, came floundering down, rolled over and over and darted forward again.

Suddenly a man was seen running from the direction of the servants' hall. It was Ole Johnson.

Father threw open the window and peremptorily ordered him to go back into the house.

"Ajax is with me," called Ole, halting. "Let Hector loose," he cried presently.

Then, hastening to the woodshed, he seized an axe and was about starting for the scene of combat.

"Stay where you are! Have you gone stark mad?" shouted father.

Ole stood for a moment irresolute. Above the din there now arose a high pitched shriek from a voice we would all have known among hundreds. It gradually became more and more smothered and finally resolved itself into a gurgling moan.

"They are killing him!" screamed Marit, sobbing aloud.

At this Ole started off as fast as he could go. Hector, too, had recognized his comrade's call. With a hoarse bark he flung himself against the hall door, tearing and scratching with teeth and claws, determined to get out.

"Then, in Heaven's name, let him go."

cried father, and Marit flew down stairs to open the door.

IT WAS A BATTLE ROYAL.

The huge animal bounded northward with vigorous leaps, past Ole, and not resting until he had found him whom he was seeking. Then followed a matchless display of indomitable strength and ferocity.

Four dogs were engaged in mortal combat with one tall, powerful wolf, who was just about to get the better of Ajax. With head proudly erect, Hector sprang to the group, seized the savage brute and flung it high into the air. As it came sprawling down he throttled it and slapped the ground with it like one gone mad, making the snow fly in all directions.

Suddenly he relaxed his hold—the wolf was dead.

At the door of the servants' hall stood Ole, with Ajax in his arms. Hector bounded toward them, sniffed at the trembling, bleeding Ajax, and then darted back into the thicket of the fray. Laying the wounded hound on a cushion, Ole hurried northward again, taking with him two other lads, each armed with an axe.

When they reached the battle field the result of the combat was decided. Four wolves lay dead or dying, among a heap of mangled dogs. The others had skulked away, but their hideous howling was still making the night dismal. Hector moved from group to group, sniffing at the dead and fawning over the injured dogs that lay in the snow licking their wounds.

For more than half an hour he paced to and fro, laid down, got up again and showed every sign of intense excitement. Not until all the living dogs had gone home did he relinquish his post and present himself at the house door. As soon as he was admitted he found his way to Ajax, and with much demonstration of affection fell to licking the little fellow's wounds. This task accomplished, he dropped down with a long and weary sigh, and began to attend to his own.

Ajax crept quivering between his big comrade's legs, turned uneasily a few times, and finally curled himself up comfortably. He was pretty badly hurt, having a deep gash in the back, with a long, gurgling rent in the throat.

The next morning traces of the conflict were widespread. Blood dyed the snow; mangled, lifeless wrecks were strewn around and tufts of hair drifted about in the wind.

People gathered from all parts of the parish. Some lingered about the woodshed, where Ole narrated the blood curdling events of the night while he dressed the wolf's skin.

All this happened some years ago, but even to-day in that far away little parish in Norway the people speak of that night, and if you should go to the parsonage you would see, close to the gate of the little garden to your right, two low mounds where lie the faithful dogs, Hector and Ajax, who fought the famous battle with the wolves.