

THE UNQUENCHABLE FIRE:

Or, The Tragedy of the Wild.

CHAPTER IX.—(Cont'd)

...of Nick, forgetful of all that had happened, pursued the double of his credit be it said that, he had not seen the sudden car of the forest, not one selfish thought possessed him. Aim-sa, however, and so he went heading the rescue. His quiet eyes lit with a fiery determination as one might have expected the eyes of Nick, but not in the less demonstrative way. His soul was afire with the craft, but she was a woman.

...no longer walked, but ran, thought nothing of distance nor passing of time. He emerged from the woodland depths, leaving behind him the "bald tree-trunks" aloft their sadly drooping heads. He labored up the hillside, and, beyond the ridge, he came down into a fresh world of green giants. The trail of pursuit was still lit, red-hot, and the cry of his heart rang out. "On! On!"

...was noon when his speed slackened. Nor was it weariness that made him. Once in the echoing of breaking undergrowth, he had heard the distant prospect about him had changed. The forest had become a tangled mass of low-growing shrub, dotted with giant growths of maple, and blue-gum. It was a deeper brown than any hitherto, and the air was warm, and the valley of a wide, flowing river.

...the declivity was abrupt, and the river, too swift to succumb to the grip of winter, sounded up from below. A vast open space before him, and the peaks seemed to shrink into the hazy distance. Suddenly he halted, listening, and the breaking undergrowth came again and again; he waited for the cry of the human, but it did not come. With beating heart he hurried on; his mind was easier and his thoughts centered round the capture of the forest king. His rifle was ready to hand, and he looked for a sight of the dark fur through the bush ahead.

Now his movements became almost Indian-like in their silent stealth. Bending low to avoid the rustling branches, he crept on, and his feet scarcely gave out any sound. He no longer followed the tracks. He had turned off, meaning to come up with his quarry against the wind. At every opening in the bush he paused, his keen eyes alert for a sign of his prey before he entered it. But the leafless branches of the scrub, faintly tinged with the signs of coming spring, alone confronted him; only that—that and the noise of breaking brushwood ahead.

It quickly became plain to him that the fear was no longer adorning, but was moving about uncertainty; and as he realized this, his heart was gripped with a terrible fear. Had the brute come up with its prey? Had the tragedy been played out? He dashed forward, throwing all caution to the winds; but ere he had gone fifty yards he drew up to a halt, like one paralyzed. His eyes, which had been peering ever ahead, had suddenly dropped to the ground. It seemed as though they could no longer face that which they looked upon. For a moment his face worked as might that of a man in great pain. Then his expression changed, and a flush mounted to his brow—a flush of rage, indescribable. Again his eyelids raised, and a devilish look peered out ahead.

An opening not two acres in extent lay before him. In its midst was a blackened tree-trunk, limbless, riven, a forest giant blasted by some mountain storm. Nick was standing beside it; his gun rested against its blackened sides, and upon a fallen bough, Aim-sa was seated, scarcely a yard away. They were in deep converse, and Ralph was near enough to hear the sound of their voices, but not to distinguish that which was said. And, as he strained his tingling ears to catch the tenor of their speech, he could hear the movements of the bear in the adjacent woods.

The two in that open seemed all unconscious of what was going on so near them. Nick was gazing upon the woman with his heart laid bare in the look which he bestowed. And Aim-sa was smiling up into his face with all the arch coquetry of her sex, with that simple, trusting

look which, however guileful, must ever appeal to the strong man.

For a while Ralph looked on. The exquisite torture of his heart racked him, but he did not turn away to shut out the sight. Rather it seemed as if he preferred to thus harass himself. It was the working of his own angry passion which held him, feeding itself, fostering, nursing itself, and goading him to fury.

Suddenly the sound of movement close at hand broke the spell which held him. He looked, and saw the bear less than twenty yards off.

He gripped his rifle and his first thought was to slay. It was the hunter's instinct which rose within him. But something held him, and his weapon did not move from his side; somewhere in his heart a harsh voice whispered to him, and he listened to words of evil counsel. Then a revulsion of feeling swept over him, and he shook himself as though to get rid of something which clung about him and oppressed him. But the moment passed, leaving him still, and with a brain that was filled with cruel thoughts.

The dark form in the bush beyond moved. There came no sound, and the waiting man wondered if his eyes deceived him. No feline prowler could have moved more silently upon its prey. Not a twig rustled. It moved on; stealing, stealing. It paused at the edge of the opening.

Ralph's eyes turned upon the dead tree. Nick's back was turned, and Aim-sa was intent upon her companion. She seemed to be hanging upon his brother's every word. And Ralph's heart grew harder within him. His hand held his rifle in a nervous clutch, and his finger-nails indented the stock of it with the pressure of his hold. A shout from him would avert disaster; a shot would lay the truculent monarch low. But the shout remained unspoken; the trigger still waited the compressing hand. And the unconscious brother stood with death stealing upon him from beyond the fringe of the woods.

Solemnly the great grizzly advanced. Once in the open he made no pause. The lumbering beast looked so clumsy that the inexperienced might have been forgiven a smile of ridicule. Its ears twitched backward and forward, its head lolled to its gait, and though its eyes shone with a baleful ferocity they seemed to gaze anywhere but at its intended victims. And nothing could have been more silent, more quiet, than was that ominous advance; nothing more truculent than the deliberation of the magnificent creature's attitude. And Ralph stood watching, with lips compressed and jaw set, and a cruel frown darkening his brow. But his heart was beating in mighty pulsations, and somewhere within him a conflict was raging in which Evil had attacked in overwhelming force, and Good was beaten back, back.

Within ten yards of the tree the bear halted and reared itself upon its haunches. It stood far taller than Nick; a mighty creature, and none more fierce.

It was the last chance. Ralph's lips moved as though to shout, but only a low muttered curse came from them. Suddenly the air split with a piercing scream. Aim-sa stood erect, one arm outstretched pointing, the other rested against the tree as though she would steady herself. Her eyes were staring in terror at the huge brute as it came towards them.

Nick swung round. He was too late. There was no time to reach his rifle. His right hand plunged at his belt and he drew a long hunting knife from its sheath, and thrust himself a shield before Aim-sa.

The cry smote the savage heart of Ralph, smote it with the sear of white-hot iron. A wave of horror passed over him. It was not of his brother he thought, but of the woman he loved. Nick's death would only be the forerunner of hers. In a flash his rifle sprang to his shoulder. A second passed while his keen eyes ran over the sights, the compressing hand was upon the trigger. A puff of smoke. A sharp report. The monarch of the forest swung round with a lurch. He had not stopped, he merely changed the direction of his steps and came straight for the forest where Ralph stood.

But the magnificent brute only took a few strides. Ralph went out to meet him; but ere he came upon the creature tottered. Then, reeling, it dropped upon all fours, only the next instant to roll over upon its side, dead.

Ralph gave one glance at the fallen creature; the next moment its

presence was forgotten. He passed on, and drew up confronting those whom he had unwillingly rescued. And the depression of his brows, and the glint of his eyes, and merciless set of his jaws, all gave warning of a danger that dwarfed to insignificance that which had just passed.

"I lows I hadn't reckoned to find you wi' company," Ralph said, addressing his brother with a quietness that ill concealed the storm underlying his words. "Mebbe I didn't calculate to find you, anyway."

There was no mistaking the challenge in his look. Nick saw it. His impetuous temper rose in response. The bear was forgotten. Neither alluded to it. The two men faced each other with the concentrated jealous hatred of weeks' growth upreared in their hearts.

"Wal, I guess y've found me. What then?"

Nick squared himself, and his expression was as relentless as that of the older man. Ralph paid no heed to the taunting inquiry. He looked over at Aim-sa, who had shrunk away. Now she answered his look with one that was half pleading, half amused. She realized the feud which was between the men, but she did not understand the rugged, forceful natures which she had so stirred.

"Say, gal," Ralph said abruptly, "ther's jest us two. Ye gave yourself to me that night, maybe you've give yourself to him since. Which is it, him or me? Ye'll choose right here. Choose!"

Nick turned and looked at her with strained, anxious eyes. Ralph's face belied his outward calm.

"An' what if Aim-sa loves neither?" the woman asked, with a laugh in which there was no mirth, and some fear.

"Then she's lied," Ralph's teeth shut with a snap. Aim-sa looked from one to the other. She was beginning to understand, and with understanding came a great dread. She longed to flee, but knew that to do so was impossible.

"Aim-sa loves both," she said at last.

There was a long, deathly silence. The brooding solitude of the Wild was never more pronounced than at that moment.

Then Ralph looked into the face of his brother, and Nick returned his gaze.

"You hear?" said Ralph. "She's an Injun, I guess, an' don't know no better. Maybe we'd best settle it for her."

"That's so." Ralph threw off his buckskin shirt. Nick removed his heavy clothing. "Stand aside, woman," said Ralph. "Ye'll wait by, an' your man'll claim ye."

"Knives?" said Nick, through his clenched teeth. "Knives."

And then again silence reigned. (To be continued.)

FIGHTING CANCER.

A Cure for the Disease is Still Far Away.

A Parliamentary paper has been issued containing the report of Dr. Bashford, who represented the British Government at the second international conference for cancer research held at Paris in October last. Dr. Bashford apparently does not see that much advancement has been made, if any at all, in fighting the disease itself, but he says reviewed as a whole the conference must be pronounced to have been of some value. This, it would seem, consists chiefly in the working arrangements and the selection of subject for discussion and experiment.

Dr. Bashford, in his report, says: "The knowledge of cancer is still so vague and so ambiguous as to have prevented any unanimity or even a basis for discussion from being obtained in many points. In particular the delegates were divided upon such fundamental matters as the etiology of cancer and on what is and what is not the legitimate application of statistical methods to the investigation of the frequency of cancer. While some delegates of high standing advocated the theory that cancer is of parasitic or infectious nature, others of equal authority in the medical world held tenaciously to the contrary view."

Dr. Bashford concludes that so long as there is so much divergence of expert opinion due to the continued ignorance which prevails it is obviously hopeless to attempt to devise rational measures and as equally futile to promote an international crusade, for the prevention or reduction against ravages of cancer along the lines which are meeting with world-wide acceptance in the cases of the wars which are being waged against tuberculosis and leprosy.

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WOMEN DETECTIVES.

A Hankow telegram states that the police authorities in Hupeh province, China, have decided to employ female detectives on their force, in imitation of the western example. A special school for the training of female detectives is shortly to be established, and forty educated women of over forty years of age are to be chosen from the applicants.

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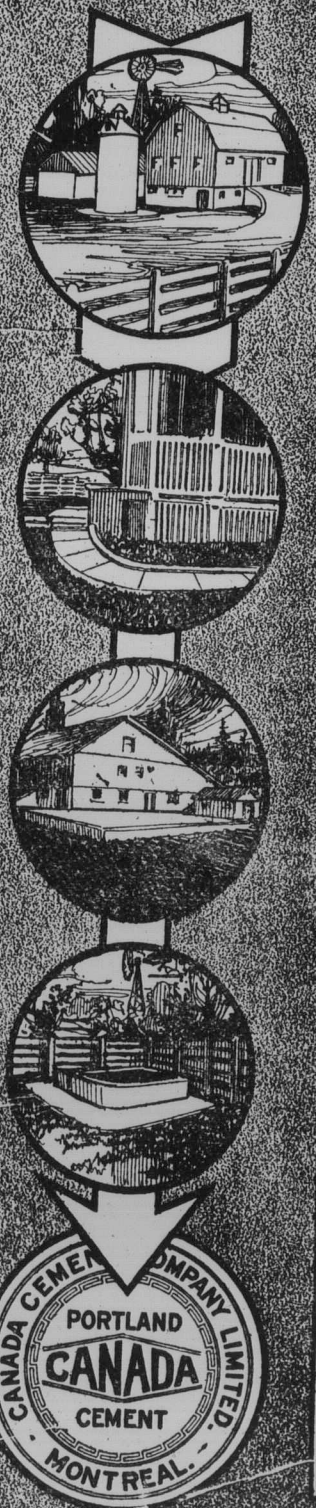
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PRIZE "C"—\$100.00 to be given to the farmer in each Province who furnishes us with a photograph showing best of any particular kind of work done on his farm during 1911 with "CANADA" Cement.

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feeling that he may have little chance against his neighbor who he thinks might use more cement than he does.

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