

REMINISCENCES OF CAMP FIRE COOKERY.

I wonder who my next cook will be? To-night the little Chinese restaurateur placed before me a feast for the eye, as well as the taste. Beefsteak, with yellow-fat trimmings; potatoes fried to a golden brown, crimson strawberries drowned in cream, and, with an airy flourish, a neatly-folded napkin. And I leaned back watching him indolently, as if it were one of life's commonplace events. What a brazen deception! If he could only see the other side of my existence, would I not be treated to one of those superior stares with which "seedy" individuals are chilled when they dare rest their shiny elbows upon Hum's table! It's as well Hum doesn't know that I've eaten from a tin plate held between my knees and without even the saving grace of a napkin; that, after wiping up the last traces of congealed bacon grease with a lump of bread, the same plate received a dab of jam. That is only one of the vicissitudes of my career.

My first cook fitted me to appreciate even a rudimentary knowledge of culinary matters in his successors. He was a great, broad-backed fellow, who amused himself while the bacon was frying, by opping down young saplings with single cuts of his butcher-knife. At night he laid aside his paddle, with which he was a true artist, seized an axe, and roamed off in search of firewood. The metallic click of his chopping would be followed by a warning shout of "Tim-ber" and the wailing crash of a falling tree. Presently he would emerge with a neatly chopped log on one shoulder and another dragging along by the axe sunk into it. Wet or dry, Bill always lit his cook-fire with one match. Sometimes the grey lichen from a spruce tree or a bundle of dry twigs, was the tinder; sometimes, when everything was soaked with rain, a roll of birch bark or a few resin-covered chips taken from a scarred evergreen.

But he made sad use of his splendid fires. His bannock-making was the source of as great tribulation to us as of indifference to himself. Three of the ingredients—flour, salt and water—were usually in the desired proportions, since they admitted of no very great variation, but the baking powder was a mystery whose workings seemed obedient to no law. Of its vital importance to the production of good bread he was confident, and it was probably on that account that it was one of the first ingredients to be used. He gave it plenty of time to "mix up," never dreaming that the little bubbles rising through the water and escaping irretrievably, were accountable for the delectable holes that breadmakers desire. His inquiring mind groped for a rational explanation of his too-substantial results, but arrived at a false one, like many philosophers, that the baking powder was not "full strength," and must be used in larger doses. Happily his experiments in that line were terminated by a shortage of material.

Always we got bannock quite devoid of porosity. Indeed, in the long strips into which Bill, with his great knife, sliced it, his bread gave the expression, "staff of life," a disagreeable literal significance. These rod-like strips were usually charred badly on one side, and it was our cook's habit to trim them into shape before bringing them to the table. Holding it by one end, the black coat was partly whittled off; then, with a dexterous toss in the air, reversed, and the other end treated in like manner. These stake-like pieces, when arranged on a tin plate, resembled a bundle of stout tent pegs.

There was such a convincing assurance about our chef that we never dared remonstrate with him. When the porridge had no salt in it, as was often the case, he would scan us with a look of tolerant scorn and explain that a little sprinkled over our platefuls would remedy so trivial a matter. Wondering that we had not thought of it ourselves, we would flatteringly thank him, and proceed to eat alternate spoonfuls of porridge and salt. But a worm will turn when trampled too severely. One Saturday we shot three partridges, turned them over to Bill, and went to bed to dream of ponds of fragrant soup.

Once I had a great steaming bowl before me, starred over with pale-yellow globules; as I raised a spoonful it changed to ink. Next morning that black dream haunted me until Bill poked his head in the tent door and inquired whether we would have the soup first or last. We demanded lots of it immediately, and presently he entered with two tin plates, each heaped with a stodgy pile of boiled rice, through which protruded various fragments of partridge. Our jaws hung loose, and for a while there was a thick silence. Bill's real forte was acting, for he assumed an air of calm dignity, before which we seemed miserable culprits. W— finally got his voice and insinuated, "Weren't you going to bring on the soup first, William?"

"Soup? You not like this kind soup?"

"Oh, I guess so; but it's middling thick." Then, seeing a hard expression settling, "White men are very queer in their tastes you know."

When we were alone, W— dragged a partridge leg out of the tenacious heap and proceeded to scrape off the adherent rice. "Soup be hanged! Let's fire him!" And the next day we told Bill that the work of paddling and cooking steadily was too much for one man, and that, for a while, Barney would have to relieve him.

Human experiences are all comparative. Bill became a pleasant memory after Emile took charge of the frying pan, or, rather, the pots. We had been rather in awe of Bill, and admired him without stint when, at the head of a big rapid, he waved his paddle and yelled a challenge to the white breakers. Shooting rapids was a mania with him; Emile's idiosyncrasy was boiling. He boiled everything that came his way. The tea was boiled assiduously; so was the bacon. Unfortunate trout and pike were cast into that insatiable pot. The ordinary cook has the weakest conception of the utility of a kettle. When at last we got released from Emile, his resourcefulness showed no sign of exhaustion. His kettle contained as many surprises as a witch's cauldron, and, through irresistible and fearsome curiosity, we watched it daily. The last operation was a masterpiece. That day it frothed and bubbled longer than usual, and when the wizard, armed with a sharp stick, began to prod into it, every member of our wandering household was an onlooker. The third strike proved successful; he dragged up a slimy, white mass, which on being deposited on a plate, slid across it, and was only maintained thereon by a skillful bit of balancing. This mercurial object was "chokedog." To his long repertoire another number had been added; chokedog, or, to use a less effective term, boiled dough, was the last word in breadmaking.

Bob followed Emile as sunshine succeeds rain. He was a white man, and a Scotchman at that. You could tell that by watching him shave the rind off a slab of bacon. His bannock was a veritable spongecake, and the rolls and pies he concocted transformed an abstemious dyspeptic into a reckless gourmand. Young Nimrod loved him as a farmer's wife loves and cherishes a hen with a red comb. He split the wood, and enthusiastically suggested new lines of research in the art of confectionery.

The memory of Bob glows brightly among these dull camp-fire satellites. As with other truly fine characters, even his failings have become exalted to the position of virtues. Bob's shortness of stature was exceeded by a like deficiency in temper, which became evident when he boiled beans. The white bean, so dear to the heart of his predecessor, stirred the worst of phobias of my last cook's nature. Being a white man he scorned the primitive "gib stick" and placed his kettles directly upon the logs, going about other affairs while they boiled. But white beans require an infinite amount of boiling. They were usually scarcely "phased" when the supporting logs were nearly burned away. The two Indian members of our camp took a deep interest in affairs about this time, and, when a log collapsed, upsetting the bean kettle, their temperament was convulsive. The great column of steam and sputtering

coals would bring Bob from some other occupation on the run, arriving only to find the execrable grain in the ashes and two solemn dark-countenanced spectators viewing indifferently the disaster. Having ascertained the damage to be irreparable, he would glare silently at the two meek redskins until the vials of his wrath overflowed in a stream of invective, whose volume left no doubt concerning the width of his earlier experiences as sailor, miner and railroad man. To his violent abuse the Indians would listen with broad grins and reply, "Well, we're not the cooks, you're the cook."

As a white man, Bob was troubled by a temptation unknown to all Indian cooks. He was fond of bathing. At noon while he perspired over his cook-fire, the rest of us sported about in the water, the water at whose very edge he was forced to watch a frying pan. But on Sundays he had greater liberty. When the bread was all ready and baking before the fire, he could shake off his few clothes and rush for the lake. While he swam and splashed about, he kept a watchful eye on the bread-baking. At intervals it became necessary to go ashore and investigate matters closely. Fancy, then, this short, broad-shouldered fellow, arising like some domestic mermaid from his favorite element, to dance round the fire in a shocking state of nudity, and, having turned his loaves, scamper back again.

Of the Geological Survey of Canada.

A LEADER OF FASHION.

Nancy lugged the baby over to the window.

Now, don't jump at "illusions," as the old lady calls them.—She loved the baby, even when his face was dirty and he howled; but she was eleven and small, while he was two and heavy—so heavy that his fat limbs would not support him for long at a time. So "lugged" he was of necessity, though with the kindest intentions.

Nancy with difficulty got him arranged, and then forgot him; for her heart was out in the spring sunshine. The puddles were not all dry yet, but here and there on the walk were patches that were almost dusty, and on the least muddy places in the road the boys were playing marbles, to the satisfaction of their souls and the detriment of their trousers. Doubts as to the cordiality of their reception at home did not trouble them yet, for "agates" and "pures" and "crockerries" in season are of more value than many garments, and "hinchin'" a greater crime than being late for tea.

But the skipping girls engrossed Nancy's attention as she flattened her nose against the window-pane that looked "mussy" in the strong light of the spring sunshine. She would not put the window up or John Edward would catch cold; but sight of unusual keenness was hers, and duller ears at twice the distance could easily have heard the shrill child-voices.

"There's Mamie Wark doing 'pepper' My, can't she go fast!—Jess has got up to eighty-two, but she'll miss pretty soon.—John Edward, be still or you'll fall out and bump your head!—I bet I could go to a hundred if I tried.—Mag Brow's skipping backwards. She's got her Sunday shoes on, too. I wouldn't skip in my Sunday shoes—if I had any. Here comes Bessie. Their baby must have gone to sleep early to-day. I wish John Edward—"

The wish was unuttered, for the girls had stopped skipping and were surrounding the new arrival in a compact body from which ascended a cloud of "Oh's" and "Ah's," and "How lovely," somebody even said "Swell," and Nancy grew momentarily more excited as the girls seemed determined not to move so that she could see.

After what seemed like a day of waiting the group broke up, and Nancy added her adjective to the contribution. "Sweet," she said, as she saw Bessie's new red and blue skipping-rope with white handles; and an unusual cloud of envy swept over her clear little soul, and she wondered "Why?" just as we all do.

Her nose hurriedly left the pane and resumed its normal shape, and her thoughts left the unsurveyed wilderness of speculation to come back to the beaten track, and to John Edward vociferously expressing his annoyance at the

skillful way an early fly was tickling his nose and eluding his fat hand. By the time he had been kissed and consoled, stayed with flagons and comforted with apples, speculation had been deposed from Nancy's mind and determination ruled in its stead.

After this manner she resolved: "I will have a skipping-rope of my very own—red and blue with white handles."

And she did. But resolve without works being dead, the necessary fifteen cents, saved penny by penny, was not forth-coming until September. It might have arrived sooner, but tending baby in that household was a labor of love; at least there was no pecuniary reward attached thereto, and it was so constant an employment as to leave very few spare moments to get gain from other forms of labor.

However, as all things come to him who waits—and works while he waits—the treasured fifteen cents passed over the counter, and a pair of eager hands clutched the long desired rope. The proud possessor sallied forth without delay to display it before the eyes of her friends. For this is human nature, and Nancy was human.

John Edward was obliging enough to be still asleep when she reached home, which made it possible for Nancy to go out on the sidewalk just at four o'clock and to perform an amazing series of "salts" and "peppers," backwards and up to a hundred just as the girls came rushing round the corner from school—Mag Brown at the head.

They stopped short. Then Mag led in speech as she had in action, and there was a pitying contempt in the speech that stung worse than the rubber strap at school.

"Why, Nancy Fulton, don't you know that nobody skips now? It ain't in fashion any more."

This utter condemnation was almost too much. For a quarter of a second the rope wavered. Then it steadied itself and with its owner's aid performed some marvellous acrobatic eccentricities to accompany the Declaration of Independence delivered with staccato effect:

"I don't care-if-it-ain't the fashion. It's going to be."

And it was. Contrary to all precedent, EVERYBODY skipped that September.

THE BALLAD OF THE ANGEL.

"Who is it knocking in the night,
That fain would enter in?"
"The ghost of lost delight am I,
The sin you would not sin,
Who comes to look in your two eyes
And see what might have been."

"Oh, long ago and long ago
I cast you forth," he said,
"For that your eyes were all too blue,
Your laughing mouth too red,
And my torn soul was tangled in
The tresses of your head."

"Now mind you with what bitter words
You cast me forth from you?"
"I bade you back to that fair hell
From whence your breath you drew,
And with great blows I broke my heart
Lest it might follow, too."

Yea, from the grasp of your white hands
I freed my hands that day,
And have I not climbed near to God
As these his henchmen may?"
"Ah, man, ah, man! 'twas my two hands
That led you all the way."

"I hid my eyes from your two eyes
That they might see aright."
"Yet think you 'twas a star that led
Your feet from height to height?
It was the flame of my two eyes
That drew you through the night!"

With trembling hands he threw the door,
Then fell upon his knee.
"Ah, armed vision cloaked in light,
Why do you honor me?"
"The angel of your strength am I
Who was your sin," quoth she.

"For that you slew me long ago,
My hands have raised you high;
For that you closed my eyes—my eyes
Are lights to lead you by
And 'tis my touch shall save the gates
Of Heaven when you die!"

—Smart Set.