

An Autumn Picnic at the Battle River

Specially written for The Western Home Monthly by Wolf Willow

ON a Saturday morning in mid September Alberta's sun and a chilly wind were striving as to whether it should be a summer or a fall day. There had been some frosty nights, and, already, the gorgeous hues of autumn were put on. The Battle River hills were brown and wind-swept, and they seemed to meet the sunshiny turquoise sky, with white clouds here and there to make the blue seem more intense. On the brown hills lay mats of vivid green ground-cedar, with pale blue berries on it, and along the river's edge the grass was like emerald plush. Between the hills were the wooded coulees, with rustling yellow and green poplars, intermixed with the blazing reds and deep garnets of various trees and bushes. The rapids were singing, the river was low, so the children could wade it in places, the blue-birds and meadow-larks were flocking up and singing their au revoir; the crows were cawing in the tree-tops, black against the blue. The ducks were in the silvery, open water, fairly waiting to be shot. The deer were peering out of the coul-

ow pony, and rounding up the cattle to drive to the valley, I filled a big jug of water for tea, small caddies of tea and sugar, and a bottle of milk. I added a print of butter, a couple of loaves of bread, part of a cake, a jar of pin-cherry jam, a bottle of pickles, some cold potatoes to be fried, and a bottle of cranberry ketchup, and some hard boiled eggs. A few dishes, frying pan, and a potato boiler, the kind with a spout for draining, completed the outfit. In this potato pot, I intended boiling the water and making the tea both—an excellent thing for camping.

Soon we loaded up, and the cavalcade started. As I passed through the yard I "gave orders" for a chicken to be killed, which I proposed to pluck on the way, and fry over the camp fire.

Now I think I hear some old-timer who reads this, saying, "Yes, the writer ordered a chicken shot off a stook, those people away back in the country don't pay any attention to prairie chicken season."

Alas, how little faith in human nature!



Dog who dug out master from trench blown up by Germans allowed to remain by bedside of comrade.

One of the most interesting stories of the war, a story that touches the heart and gives another example of a dog's fidelity to his master, accompanies this picture. This French sergeant was practically buried alive, when the Germans destroyed a trench by blowing it up by a mine. He was saved by his old faithful dog, whom he had taken with him when ordered to the front. The dog scented his master and succeeded in digging away the earth until he uncovered the face of the sergeant. Not being able to dig any further through pure exhaustion, the dog sat there and howled, and barked till some soldiers in the next line of trenches attracted by the incessant and pitiful nature of the cry came along and rescued the man. He was rushed to a field hospital and revived, and was later sent to the American Hospital in Paris. The heroic saviour of the sergeant was allowed to remain with the wounded man in the hospital, the one exception made to the general rule of "No Dogs Allowed".

ees, the coyotes trotting over the hills. Soon the page would be turned, it would be winter, and we could not have a picnic.

All these delightful things I knew as well as that provoking husband of mine, who described them, as I put on a roaring fire in the already hot kitchen, preparatory to "Saturday's scrub."

"Fancy my leaving a house like this on a Saturday to go picnicking, and maybe have someone come to-morrow—Sunday."

"Well, we'll have to have another picnic to-morrow, and you won't be at home if anyone does come. We men will be working down at the river quarter to-day anyway, and we'll have to have a lunch, and you may as well come along, and we'll cook it outside and enjoy ourselves—and go to-morrow too."

The two little boys added their pleadings, as: "it wouldn't be any fun without mother," so behold me darning up my fire and preparing to go a-picnicking on Saturday morning. Shades of my housewifely grandmothers!—but then my grandmothers did not live fourteen miles from town, on a homestead, with mostly hills and trees for neighbors—the greatest excitement a bunch of buffaloes on the Heart Hill, in the Park, or a rainbow ending up on the near side of Old Baldy.


Well, while the husband, his father and the boys were loading up shovels, scraper, axe, etc., in the wagon, for their work at the river, and saddling up the

Anyway, I plucked the chicken, as I drove along in the wagon, the morning breeze carrying the feathers away. I would wash it in the river.

As we rumbled along, the air so fragrant with dying leaves and sweet grass, the sky so clear and wind-swept, the nearby hills so burnished and brown, like old copper, the ones far off so cleanly blue, I thought, how spotless is Dame Nature's house! Her servants, the Wind, the Rain, the Sun and the Frost, forever sweeping and scrubbing dusting and purifying this great mansion of hers renovating it, recarpeting, draping and perfuming it! Our primitive little homesteader's dwellings, with their little brooms, their stoves, and little fixings, how mean they are? But in her house are many mansions, and we, out in this great open, can enjoy them to the full.

We jolt along, the boys wildly glad over Saturday and a picnic, jumping in and out of the wagon, giving the cattle a run, or scaring up prairie chickens and partridges. Their voices echo from the great hills.

We go down the hillside trail, and are in the valley. The grandfather decides that he will drive the wagon along the river to the place which they intend to scrape down for a crossing—but, the rest resolve, after picketing the cow pony, to go down the river in our boat, and enjoy the fun of shooting the rapids, which are between the landing-place and the crossing. The ten-year-old announces that he has his .22 loaded to "shoot"



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