



SWAN CREEK
BLIZZARD

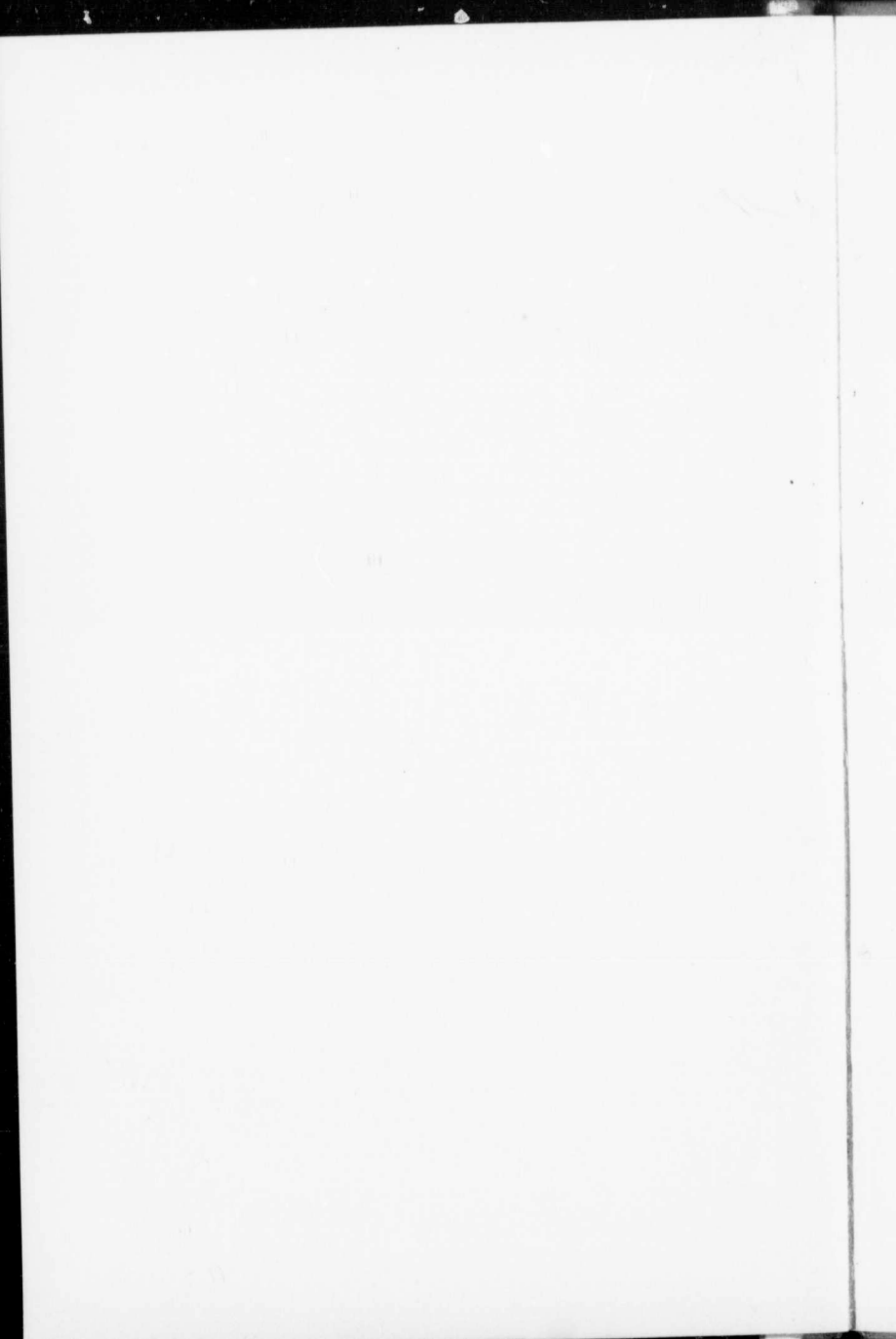
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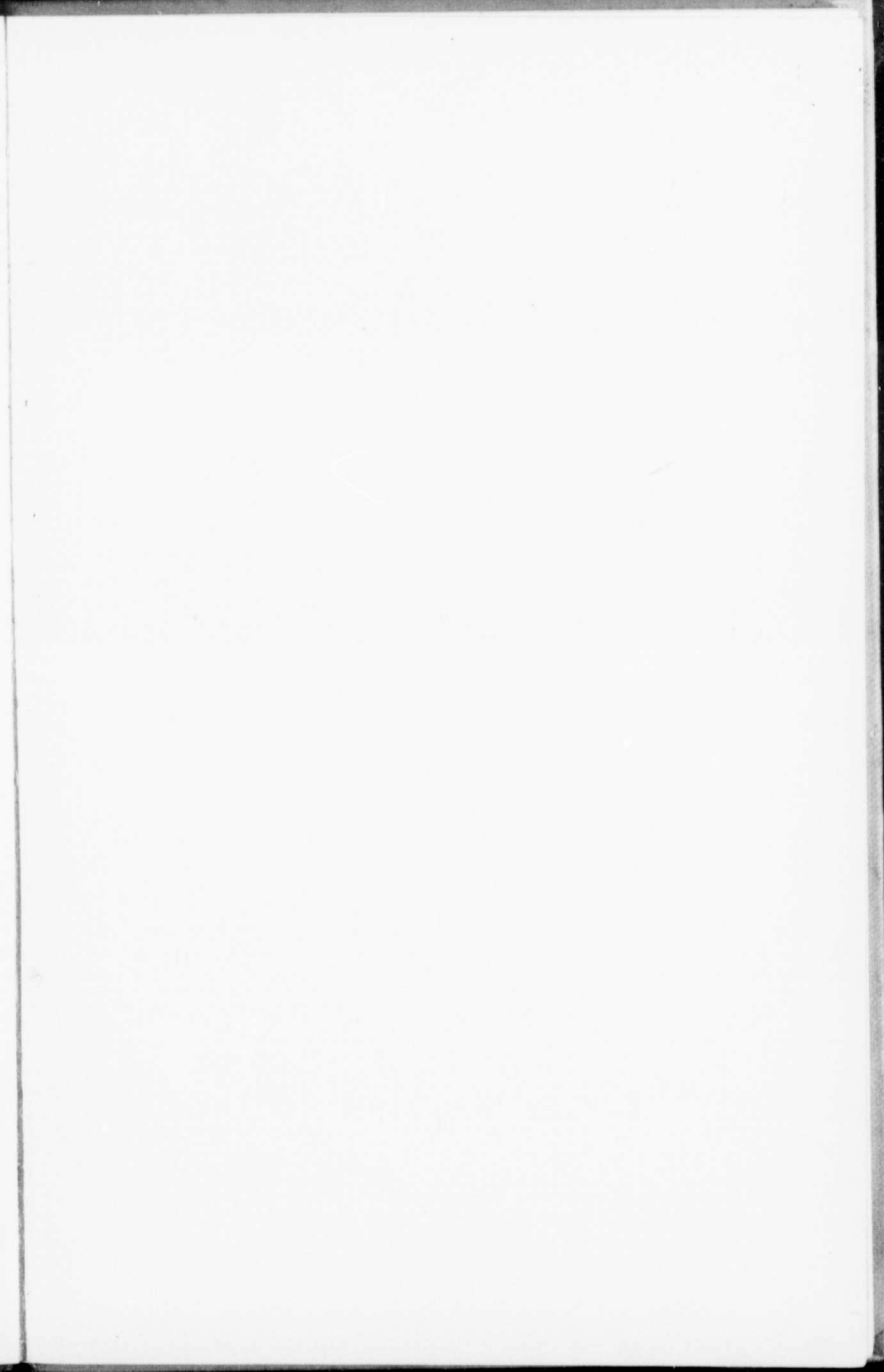
RALPH CONNOR

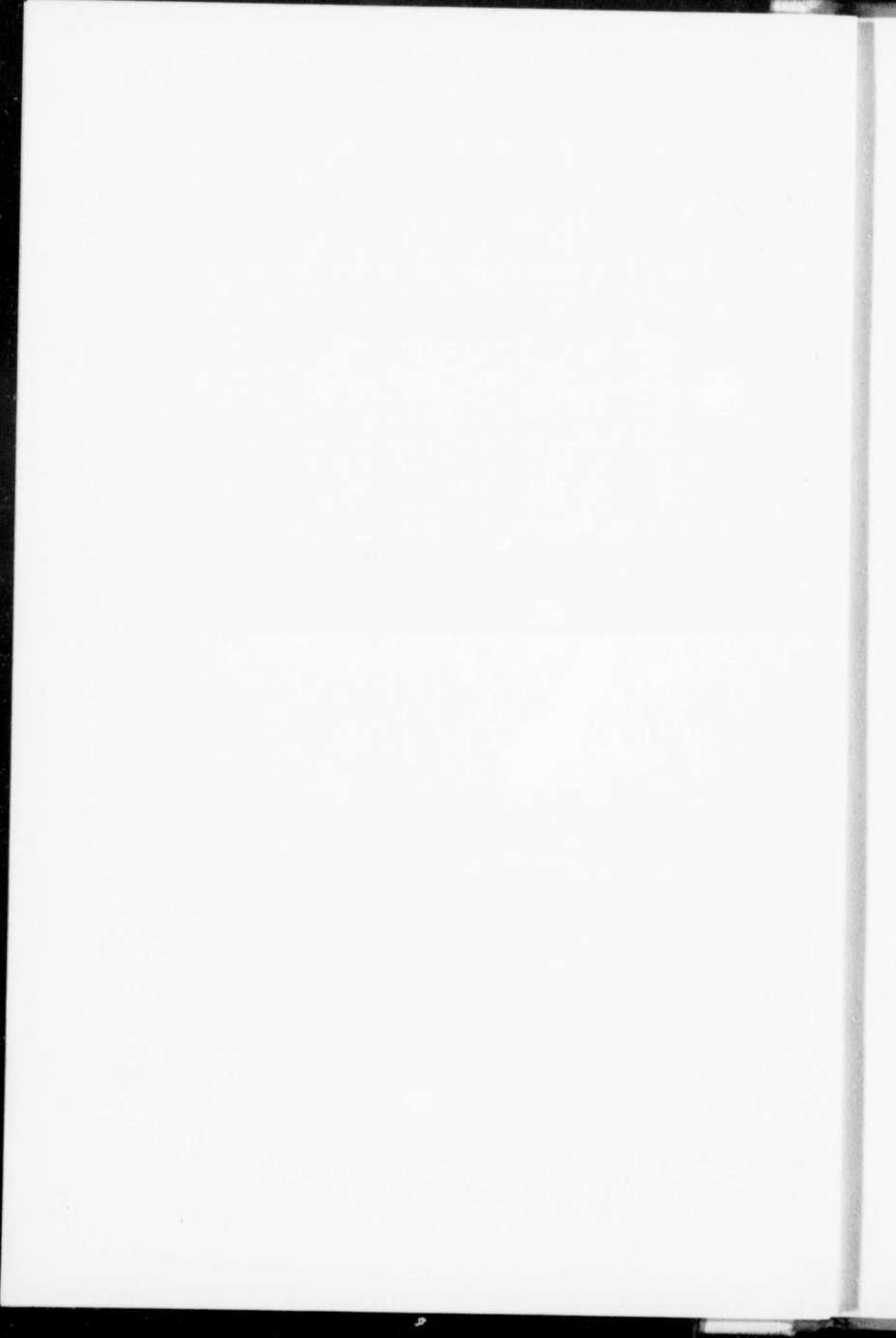
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With love to Albert
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from Mother

See following p. 29 "Breaking the Record"
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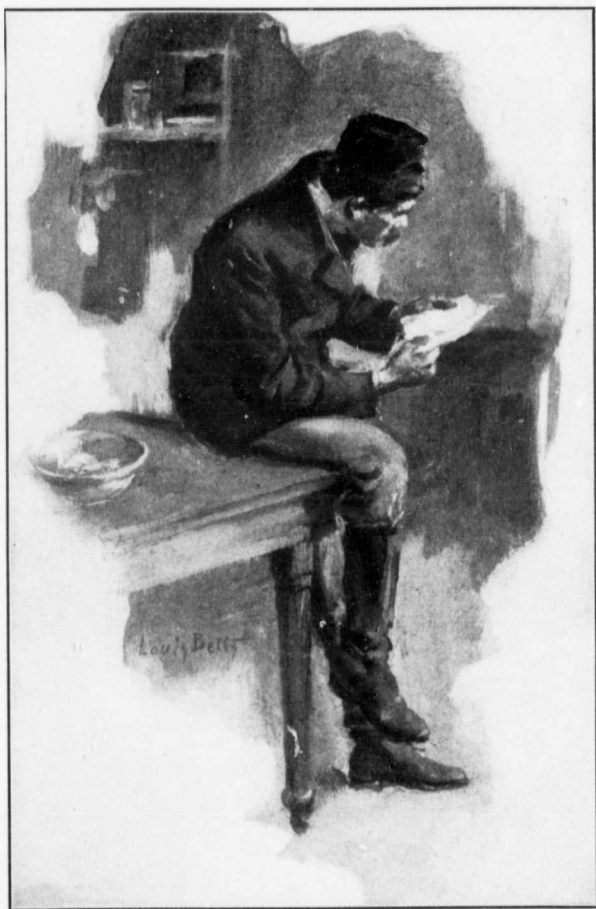
"Miss Toosey's Mission"

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P u b l i s h e r s





GWEN MAY NEED HELP *see page eleven*

The Swan Creek Blizzard

By

RALPH CONNOR

Author of

"Black Rock," "Sky Pilot," "Man from Glengarry," etc.



NEW YORK

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The Swan Creek Blizzard

CATTLEMEN of the Swan Creek country still speak of the winter of the big blizzard. For three days it raged over the hills and down the coolies, sweeping clean before it cattle and horses by the hundred to destruction. It was that blizzard that piled up more than a hundred and fifty of the XL cattle over the cut bank at the bend of the Little Porcupine; and there they were found a ghastly mass, after the first Chinook had licked up the snow banks. Not for the loss of cattle do I remember it, but for a loss that cut deep into my heart.

How well I remember the springlike airs of that bright December morning. A warm Chinook blew gently down through the hazy hills from the purple

mountains at the horizon and over all the sky arched a cloudless blue. We were sitting, the Pilot and I, with the door of our shack wide open to the sunny air, when Bill rode up.

“Fine spring day,” said the Pilot.

“Too spring for me,” answered Bill, with an ominous glance at the sky.

“You’re pretty hard to please, Bill,” said the Pilot. “I could stand about six weeks of this.”

“Well, you won’t get six hours of it.”

“Six hours? Why not?”

“Wall, if I kin read signs, there’s the tallest kind of a blizzard followin’ up this blasted Chinook,” answered Bill.

“How do you know?” said the Pilot doubtfully.

“Every how,” replied Bill, before whose experienced eye the earth and sky lay like an open book. “Why, look at them hills; look at that mist.”

“You don’t call that mist,” broke in the Pilot, “that’s a lovely haze.”

"Haze, is it?" drawled Bill; "wall 'tain't the kind of haze I aspire to this time o' year." Then he went on, "No! before you're six hours older you'll see a blizzard that'll blow till you can't see your feet. Comin' past the cañon trail by the way, the old man up there is laid up rather—just along by the upper trail there, you know, I seen some deer makin' fer the bluffs. The cattle are dreadful oneasy, bunchin' and sniffin'. Oh, you just bet your gold dust there ain't no slouch of a blizzard a hustlin' on the back of that there lovely haze."

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"Well, I'm goin' to run a bunch of cattle off the open into a coolie, where they won't be drove into next week, and where we kin find them without diggin'."

"Is the Old Timer in bed?" asked the Pilot.

"Oh, jest layin' round, you know. Nothin' too serious, I guess," replied Bill.

"Wall, I'm off," he continued, wheel-

ing his broncho, "better make this your day at home. So long!" and off he went at a lope.

"Good-bye, Bill; come back for supper," sang out the Pilot after him.

"You watch me," he called back over his shoulder.

As the morning wore on, the haze deepened over the hills, and the sun lost its kindly, genial look and glared at the world with an angry, bloodshot eye. The Chinook wind fell into a dead calm. It may have been that Bill's ominous words impressed me, but it seemed that nature was gradually steadying herself for some tremendous shock. The Pilot could not settle to his work. He wandered about the room, looking out now at the glaring sun, and again at the distant purple mountains.

"I don't like it," he said uneasily, "and Gwen is alone up there with her sick father."

"Oh, he is not very ill," I said rather

more carelessly than I felt, and I saw that he detected the false tone in my voice.

After another restless half hour I said, "I shall run across to the Muirs'. I promised to take dinner with them to-day. I'll be back right after." He nodded his head, still looking anxiously at the sky, which was beginning to take on a crimson tint.

I could not explain my own feeling of anxiety during the next hour, and as soon as I could decently leave I hurried back to my shack. I found the Pilot gone. On the table this note lay :—

"My dear Connor—I can't rest here; Gwen may need help, and I have determined to ride up before the storm breaks to the Old Timer's ranch. Get Bill a bang-up supper. He will be tired and hungry.

Yours,

"THE PILOT."

I looked out of the window. Large, soft flakes were falling out of a liver-col-

ored sky, and the wind was rising. I hurried down to the Stopping Place stable and found old Latour at the door looking anxiously up at the sky.

"He's near half way dere," he said.

"Who?"

"De Pilot. I tell heem he's fool for go, but he say he's better be fool nor coward." Old Latour was quite excited. "Dat leel gurl, he's fader go seeck. De Pilot say, 'he go up to see heem.' I say, 'he no good see heem. Dis awful beeg bleezard he's not get trou.' 'How long he las'?' he say. 'Free day, mebbe,' I say. By Jeorje, he's mad for go den. 'Tree day, all alone. Not moush,' he say, and pull down hees saddle. I mak heem tak Louis. Das good pony for keep de trail. He's put hees nose into de storm. Noder feller he's put hees tail. Oh dat fine pony, Louis."

It seemed to comfort the old man a good deal to feel that the Pilot was riding a pony that could put his nose into

the storm and overcome the tendency of the native cayuse to turn tail to it. I was very anxious in spite of old Latour's confidence in his pony.

"How long has he been gone?" I asked.

"'Bout half an hour, yes, more," he said.

I looked at my watch; it was three o'clock. The snow was now coming down in long, slanting lines, and beginning to bite. The sky was almost hidden, and had lost all light and color.

"He ought to be about the cañon now," I said, "and then he'll be all right."

"Yes," said the old man, "he's all right nuff, when he's pass de upper trail. Das bad spot dere."

I knew the place well. The highest point on the whole way, where the trail to the Meredith ranch leaves the main Porcupine trail.

"He'll be der now, sure nuff," con-

tinued he, pulling out his big silver watch from his waistband.

"I hope so," I said with all my heart, for even as I spoke I heard a strange sound, such as had never come to my ears before. It was not a roar, it was too soft for that. There was a hissing, beating sound, as if unseen wings, great and innumerable, were sweeping down upon us; an awesome heart-smiting sound. A moment more and the blizzard had struck. I had to fight my way step by step to my shack, and by the time I had gained my door the world had vanished from my sight behind this whirling, shimmering curtain of choking, blinding snow. I had hardly got my fire going when the door was pushed open and in came Bill.

"Wall!" he called out, "how d'ye fancy your lovely haze now? Ain't this a sneezer?" He look round the room, then stared at me and said, "Whar's the Pilot?"

I handed him the note saying, "I was down at Muir's and found this when I came back."

He read it through slowly, and then asked, "When did he start?"

"About half-past two, old Latour said."

He said no more, but took up his leather coat which he had just laid off.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"I ain't goin' to sit here if I know myself, with the Pilot somewheres into this blizzard," he answered almost savagely.

"Got any brandy?"

"A flask full."

"Roll up a pair o' blankets, and git me half a dozen biscuits. I'm goin' down to the stable. Kin you find your way down there? Bring 'em down."

I felt the bitterness in his voice, and I knew he was blaming me for not following the Pilot at once.

In ten minutes I was at the stable with the blankets done up in two rolls and

the biscuits and brandy in my pocket. I found Bill saddling the Duke's black broncho, Jingo, who, having been in the stable for two weeks, was like to knock things to pieces. But Bill paid no attention to the antics, but stood up close to him while he cinched the saddle and lashed on the one blanket behind it. The black brute squealed and began to plunge, but Bill kept close to him, tying his tongs as regardless of his antics as if he were a lamb. When all was snug and taut he jerked the tie-line loose, flung the long bridle reins over the head of the rearing animal, then with a fierce grip he seized with both hands the rings of the bit, ran the horse back out of his stall, and, with a mighty wrench hurled him clear off his feet onto his side.

"Git up!" he yelled, and Jingo sprang to his feet, more surprised and humbled than he had ever been in his whole previous history. "Stand thar, will you!"

said Bill in a terrible voice; and Jingo stood quite still.

"What are you going to do?" asked Bill, seeing me with my horse saddled and all ready.

"Going to follow you," I said shortly, for his words and manner had so stung me that I had resolved to follow him till I dropped.

He looked at me a moment in silence, then suddenly stretching out his hand, he said in a husky voice:

"Ye're all right, pard, I take it all back," and without a word he swung himself on to his saddle and rode out into the blizzard.

The air was thick with whirling snow, the wind seemed to be blowing from every quarter at once. Every vestige of earth and sky was shut out from sight by the snow-cloud that seemed to wrap one's head about filling eyes and throat and shutting off the breath. By what means he found and kept the trail I know

not, but not once did Bill falter. On he pressed against and through that wall of blinding, choking snow. After the first quarter of a mile, during which it was difficult to keep him in sight, Jingo settled down into a long, easy, steady lope, as if he knew that serious business was in hand. Occasionally he dropped the beaten track, but a plunge or two and he was on the trail again. Keeping his black tail just before my pony's nose, I had no serious trouble in fighting my way through the blizzard. It is not the cold, nor the depth of the snow, nor the stress of the driving storm that makes the blizzard dangerous. It is its power to shut out the world and to utterly bewilder that strikes terror to the heart. Some men and some horses can make their way, however, without hesitation. Such a man was Bill, and such a horse Jingo.

For an hour we fought along, now slowly feeling our way and then breaking

into a lope where the lie of the ground made the trail easier to keep. Suddenly Bill pulled up, and, dismounting, faced Jingo about and gave me his reins to hold.

"Keep 'em just as they are," he said. "I rather think the trail breaks off about here into the cañon. Mind you keep 'em just so. I don't want to lose my direction."

Even as he spoke he passed out of sight, but in a moment or two he reappeared and said:—

"It's pretty tough keepin' your bearin's when you're tryin' to find a trail. I want you to count ten and then holler and keep on till I come back."

In a few minutes—they seemed hours—he came back and took his horse.

"You stay here till you hear me holler," he said, and disappeared again.

Soon his call came and in a short time we were following the trail down into the cañon. Here the track was easier to

find, and before long we were at the Old Timer's door.

"I guess I'll just peek in," said Bill in a low voice, "there ain't no occasion to make no row, case he ain't there."

He opened the door gently and passed in, but came out almost immediately.

"The good Lord help us, he ain't been there," he said with a kind of gasp.

"You didn't see Gwen?" I asked.

"No. Saw Joe. Look here, I'm goin' back to that upper trail," he added. "I think p'r'aps I'd be better alone."

"You go to thunder!" I replied, "don't lie to me. Anyway I'm going with you."

He came close up to me.

"You're a white man," he said earnestly, "but I ain't comin' back till I find him, and there ain't no need for you ——" he paused.

For an answer I turned my horse towards the gate. Bill swung himself up

into his saddle, and in a few strides Jingo was leading me once more.

"Blamed if you ain't white—clear to the bone," he said, turning in his saddle towards me, and somehow his words gave me a great thrill of joy and put new courage into my heart.

Back through the cañon we rode and up to the open again. Once more Bill found the upper trail and came hurrying back to me.

"We ain't got half a minute to spare," he said anxiously. "It'll be dark in half an hour, and then God Almighty help us."

We went along at what seemed to me a reckless pace. But the black horse never swerved from his long, steady lope. After we had gone about half a mile Jingo suddenly stopped short. Before I could ask the cause Bill was off and down in the snow exploring.

"Guess we've struck the scent," he called out. "Come here."

There, half covered by the drifting snow, lay a sleigh overturned, with its load strewn about.

"Whar's the team? Whar's the driver?" Bill shouted to me. "Thar's where the Pilot is. You bet he's monkeyin' round pullin' some fool out o' the snow."

He dropped on his hands and knees, feeling all about, and finally vanishing into the darkening mist of blinding snow.

"Come on," I heard him call, and on coming up I found him with a wisp of hay in his hand.

"They've gone down the coolie, I do believe. Come on!" he cried. He was excited as I had never seen him before. He flung himself into his saddle and shouted to Jingo, who plunged headlong down the coolie. I followed as best I could, and after a few minutes' hard work came upon Bill standing at his horse's head, in the shelter of a poplar bluff.

"Listen!" he said, holding up his hand, and we stood listening for our lives. But only the hissing boom of the blizzard beat upon our ears.

"I swear I heard something just as I— there ——" He put up his hand again, and through the storm came the sound of a voice singing:—

"God in the midst of her doth dwell,
Nothing shall her remove."

Bill dropped on his knees, and taking off his cap he sobbed out: "Thank the good God! That's him. It's the Pilot." Then he sprang to his feet and yelled:—

"Hello! You dod-gasted fool-hunter, where in thunder an' lightnin' air you, anyway?"

"Hello, Bill! Here you are, old boy."

In the bluff we found them; the Pilot livid with cold and near the last stage of exhaustion, holding up a stranger as they tramped wearily the path they had

beaten around the horses to keep themselves from freezing to death.

"Oh, Bill," cried the Pilot, making a brave attempt at a smile, "you're a great man."

Bill held him at arm's length a moment, and then said solemnly:—

"Wall! I've come into contact with some fools, idjits, blanked idjits"—Bill had lost his grip of himself for a moment—"in my life, but such a blanked, conglomerated idjit, it hasn't been my pleasure to mix with up to this point in my career."

The Pilot by this time was in fits of hysterical laughter.

"And," continued Bill, with increased solemnity, "I cherish the conviction——"

"Oh, Bill," shrieked the Pilot, "for Heaven's sake, stop, you'll kill me if you say another word."

Then Bill paused, looked anxiously into the Pilot's face, and saying: "Here!

Let's get home," rolled a blanket round him and set him on Louis.

"You won't need your hands; he'll follow all right," he said as he mounted Jingo. "Come on."

"Wait, Bill!" cried the Pilot; "what about this man, he's almost played out?"

"Played out, is he?" snorted Bill, contemptuously. "If he's as strong as he smells he ought to get through. Any man that don't know when to leave whiskey alone shouldn't travel without his keeper."

"But we can't leave him here!" pleaded the Pilot.

"Can't, eh! You watch my smoke," said Bill. "If he can't follow with two horses he can't with three."

"Oh, I say, Bill! take him along," said the Pilot earnestly.

"Look here!" cried Bill impatiently, "do you think I'm a blasted snow-plow? Come on! Every second counts. He'll follow all right."

And so he did, and fighting our way through the storm, and dark and cold now grown intense, we made the cañon, and soon after the Old Timer's door.

Bill carried the Pilot in and laid him on a pile of skins before the fire. He was not badly frozen, but he was utterly exhausted. During the three days of the blizzard he lay weak and faint, nursed by Bill day and night. With all a mother's tenderness in touch and tone, Bill waited on his every wish, breaking forth now and then in loving wrath upon his folly for going back after the stranger.

"But he would have been lost, Bill," said the Pilot gently, after one of Bill's outbursts.

"Wall, let him," growled Bill.

"Bill," answered the Pilot softly, "we were lost once, you know."

And Bill turned and looked away and said not a word, remembering, I have no doubt, Him who came to seek the lost.



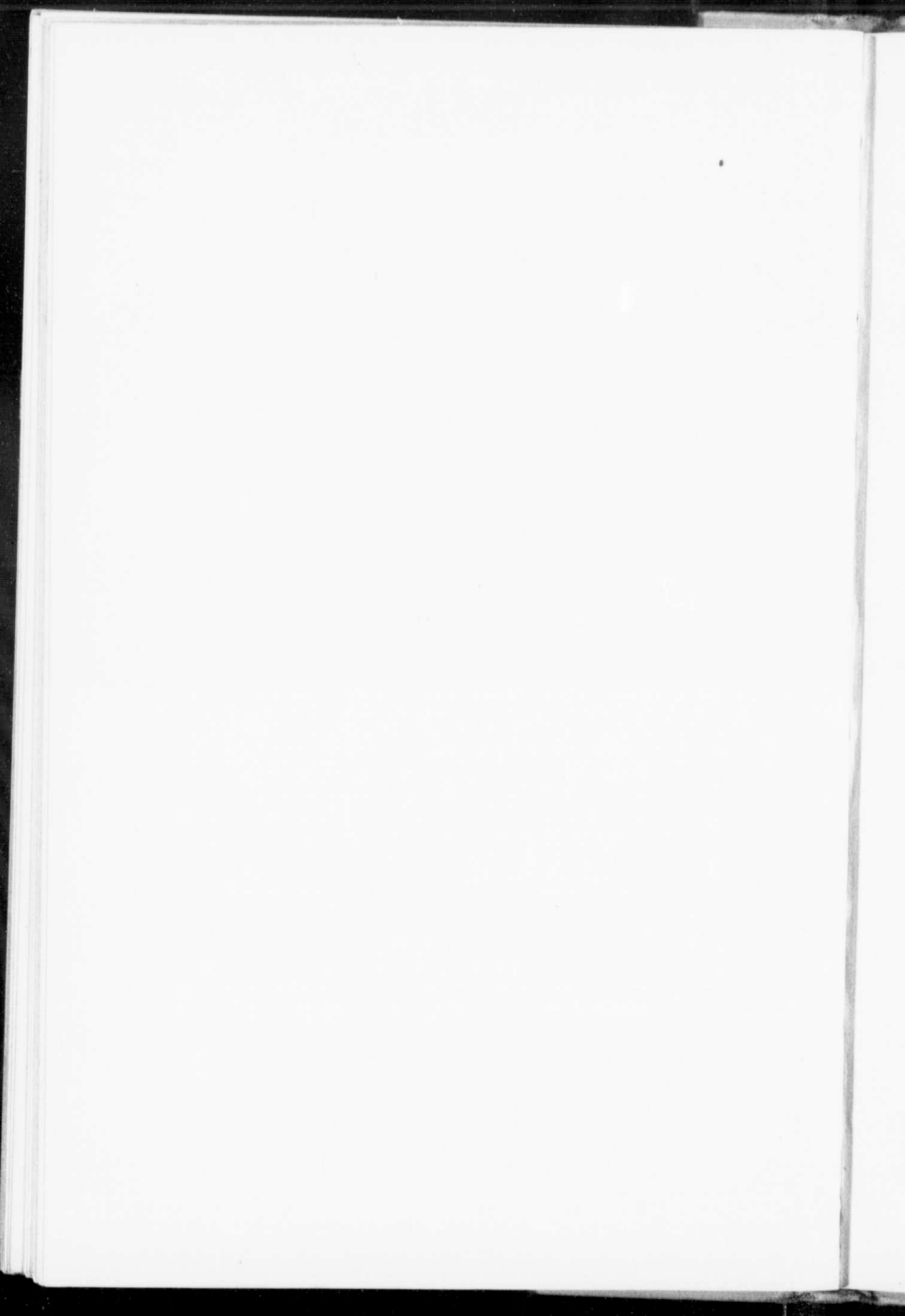
"WE WERE LOST ONCE, YOU KNOW"



The Swan Creek Blizzard 29

The Pilot never was the same again, but long after, when the first bitterness of his going from us was over, Bill said one day to me:—

“That’s how he got his death, seekin’ after that lost idjit. It was all blamed foolishness, but I guess p’r’aps that’s the best after all.”



Breaking the Record

By
RALPH CONNOR

Author of
"Black Rock," "Sky Pilot," "Man from Glengarry," etc.



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Breaking the Record

"SIXTEEN hours is the record to Winnipeg Beach, with a night's rest at Selkirk. We ought to do it in twelve." So spake my grave-faced elder.

"Twelve! Say eight, if those youngsters did it in sixteen." I had just come off a canoe trip of two hundred miles or so, and felt fit for anything.

My elder I knew to be always in good form, hard as hickory, brown, thin and steady; a good man to have at your back. He is worth describing, this elder of mine, but I know better than to attempt a description. He was not always an elder; was once a 'Varsity football captain, the glory of his team, and now the pride of the school team where he is master, and where the boys speak in admiring tones of his legs and shoulders, and the girls of his deep blue eyes. They are good eyes—but I have gone as far as it is safe for any minister to go in describing an elder, especially an elder who has been a 'Varsity captain, and who carries a resolute, rugged face, lit by deep blue eyes, above football shoulders and legs. He has his limitations, as all men, but fewer than most.

We are standing in the early morning before the Canoe Club house on the bank of the Red River,

which draws out "the links of its long, red chain" some fifty miles to the lake on the side of which lies our camp. Duffy is mending the slits and seams in our canoe, her ancient and beautiful shape sadly marred by the weight of years and much dunnage. She has no shoulders to speak of; they have disappeared quite into her belly. My elder stands looking at her with unadmiring eyes.

"Looks as if she had the mumps," I suggest.

"To me," replies my elder slowly, "she looks like a matronly old cow. Let's call her the Sylph."

"Oh, she'll swim all right," said Duffy, who is renting her to us as a very special kindness, for canoes are not to be had for love or money, and not always for love and money.

"She looks as if she might," says my elder. "Can you?" turning to me.

"Why?"

He says nothing, but as Duffy gently slides her into the water he stands watching the leaks that break through her here and there.

"Better give her another dose," he continues, looking reproachfully at Duffy.

"She's been out of the water some time, and she's pretty dry," apologizes Mr. Duffy.

"That's more than we'll be," replies my elder with unbroken gravity.

A little more patching and she is declared fit. We load our stuff. My elder insists on giving me the stern; he himself takes the bow, and we are off for Winnipeg Beach, sixty or seventy miles away.

We pass St. Boniface on the right, where a single tower above the old cathedral has taken the place of Whittier's "turrets twain" of the older building. The memory of great names lingers about this French hamlet, which in the old days was the headquarters of many a noble missionary enterprise, and of other enterprises not exactly missionary, and perhaps not so noble; but from the shadow of these "turrets twain" went forth in the old days to the far north and the far west men whose names any church might hold in reverence. I have met them in the mountains, and worked with them and learned to honour and respect them, and if I am worthy I hope to meet them again, when our day's work here is done. I have often wondered whether they dared to share any such hope concerning me. The future of the heretic must always be perplexing to one of the faithful.

Those old days were days of heroic deeds and heroic men. They lived hard lives, and danger was their constant comrade. They fronted storms and all the wildnesses of nature and of man with steady heart and unshrinking courage, and in the midst of their work they laid them down to rest.

Among others one stone stands there that bears the mark of history, for on its face is carved the single word "Riel." Under the stone Louis Riel sleeps, the unworthy leader of the worthy cause he championed and of the men who dared to follow him.

Under the railway bridge the "long red chain"

winds and twists itself, till after two hours' paddle we are only opposite the other cathedral, St. John's. Gray and hoary it stands amid the historic graves of its great and noble dead. Men of the mighty past sleep there, Selkirk's and Wolseley's men and the men of the Honourable Hudson's Bay Company. How strangely that name sounds as the designation of a business firm of to-day. Honourable? Yes, all things considered, honourable indeed, if the administration of a vast country, sparsely peopled by Indians, half-breeds and traders, with rare justice and almost unbroken success can be taken as evidence. But was it all for naught? one may ask impatiently. Nay, but for trade, but trade carried on in such a manner as still excites our wonder and wins our admiration. These hardy, silent, stalwart men of Orkney and the Highlands spent alone their long, long winters, whose monotony was broken only by the visit of the Indian runner or the fellow-trader, with his pack train gay with many-coloured cloths and jingling bells. They not only plied their business well and to the company's profit, but set their stamp upon the country's face and upon its history. Great men they were. They dared the dangers of the unknown and unexplored, they were loyal to their country, their King or their Queen, faithful to duty, patient to endure, quick to strike, and there they lie asleep. Alas, that we should forget. But the river is flowing and the sun is growing hot, and we must be off again.

An hour and a half's paddle and we sweep around

a noble bend of the river, and see before us the spire of the old Kildonan church—it, too, surrounded by its graves. There, about their beloved church, sleep those sturdy Presbyterians who, for a quarter of a century and more, without minister or ordinances, held fast to their ancient Scottish faith—the Sutherlands, the Polsons, the Macbeths, the Munros and all the rest of them—names now borne by men high in the new life of the west as lawyers and merchants, statesmen and farmers, ministers and scholars, but not more worthily than by those pioneers of the Red River Valley.

Among the rank and file of that worthy company lie sleeping a noble three, whose names will ever find a place on western Canada's roll of honour: Black, the first to lift up the blue banner in this lone and far distant land and for twenty-five years to hold it aloft, till at his post he fell; King, the scholar, the man of devotion, of conscience, of duty, revered and loved by all who came under his touch, and Robertson, the great superintendent, statesman, hero and Christian missionary, than whom no greater ever trod these prairies, nor, I doubt, ever shall. There they sleep, their names cut in granite above them and deep in the nation's life around them, happy so to have lived their hard lives and to have died worn and weary, but still invincibly willing to live or bravely willing to die. We salute them as we pass. God makes us worthy of them.

A few miles further on brings us to St. Paul's, where stands the Indian school, where young In-

dians are taught all soberly their three R's and other things, with the hope that they may grow into mechanics and farmers, and so become citizens of our country. Shades of the red men of the plain and the canoe, of the rifle and hunting knife! I can fancy how your bones shudder in your moulded graves in rattling horror at the degeneracy of your sons. But what else is left to the Indian after he has lost his great plains and his rivers, his buffalo and his deer? What else but tailor-made clothes and shingle-roofed houses, and days of humdrum work, with plenty to eat and drink? But there is good work done in that school, and good men and women are giving their lives to it. Still when I look at the trim buildings and the gardens about and the well-fenced fields of wheat, and think of the fleets of canoes that in those distant days used to steal along these banks, filled with painted warriors, or later laden with bales of furs for the fort, all that is wild in me, all that is of the river and the plain and the open sky, moves me to envy the men of the past and to pity their children of to-day.

A ferry or two, more curves and bends, and we begin to wonder where are the famous rapids.

"Hello!" we call to a fisherman sitting in his boat by the river bank. "How far to the rapids?"

"Dunno. That fellow across the river there can tell you. I'm a stranger here."

"How far to St. Andrew's Rapids?" we call to the man across, who is preparing to plunge into the river.

"Five miles," he replies, going in head first, declining further parley.

"Good. We are making good time," I say, encouragingly. "If we hadn't to stop so frequently to bail out our Sylph we would have been at the rapids by this time."

In half an hour or so we see a young man standing on the bank.

"How far to the rapids?"

"Three miles." And we feel we are doing finely. Half an hour later we discover another fisherman.

"How far do you call it to St. Andrew's Rapids?"

"Six miles."

"What a liar!" murmurs my elder in pity. "This water looks too much like business for the rapids to be six miles away."

I agree, and round the next turn ask again the distance, and find it is about two miles to the Little Rapids. That explains the elasticity of this distance. There are the little and the big rapids; but we do not care how far they are now, for we are in the swift water.

On the banks the works of the St. Andrew's locks are visible, that have been slowly dragging themselves on for the last two years. We wish them better speed and paddle on, for the water is tossing white before us.

"Where is the channel, old man?" I say to my bow.

"Don't know. A little to the right or centre looks good, but any old place will do." My elder

has been down the rapids of the Winnipeg River and nothing in the Red can cause him concern, and rightly enough, too, for a few pitches and tosses, a long, swift sweep, and we toss regretfully and all too soon through. That is the way of rapids. Rarely do they last long enough for us going down.

But the sun has been beating hot on the back of our necks, and we have not paused in our steady swing except to bail the Sylph, and now I suggest a camp; but my elder is foresighted and would put the better half of the journey behind us ere we pause.

"How would it do to make the lower fort before grub?" he suggests, and I hasten to agree. I would not for the world have my elder, who is of iron nerve himself, suspect any weakening of mine, so we put in our best strokes and by two o'clock the massive walls and bastions of the lower fort swing into view.

Solid and old and gray it stands, a fine bit of historic masonry, almost our only relic on the river of those stirring days when the Honourable Hudson's Bay Company ruled the land. The Union Jack floats high above the fort, displaying the letters H. B. C. that have for two and a quarter centuries held the loyal homage of the Indian and the half-breed between the lakes and the Rockies and have made the hearts of chief factors, factors, traders and humbler servants of the company beat quick with pride and devotion.

A touch of colour appears on the bank near the old fort where the tents of the Canadian Mounted Rifles,

from Winnipeg, stand trim and neat. At the present moment His Majesty's gallant soldiers look ordinary enough, and impressively suggest Carlyle's "forked radishes," for they are taking headers into the Red, and in other ways disporting themselves in the tawny river. We pass the time of day and paddle on.

Below the fort an elm-tree holds out an inviting shade. We yield ourselves and camp and boil our tea; and there at easy supine in that elm shade we lie, till my elder admonishes me of the flight of time by beginning to pack.

Selkirk is only five miles away, and the afternoon is young, so we loaf along till we come to a boom of logs drawn in about a sawmill, where we make inquiries concerning the mouth of the river, and evidently these inquiries are worth making.

"How far to the mouth?" we ask a lumberman on the boom.

"Twenty-five or thirty miles."

"Any difficulty in finding it?"

"Well, hardly. There are lots of 'em."

"How?"

"Well, there are three main channels into the lake, the east, north and west, and lots of other openings besides."

We begin to be awake.

"Which is the best for us to take for Winnipeg Beach?"

"The west channel."

"Is it easy to find?"

"Yes. Follow the west bank. Keep turning to the left."

"Is there any fear of our losing our way?" I ask. He looked at me doubtfully, then carefully scanned my elder.

"No, I guess not."

My elder's hard, brown face and sinewy brown arms have a trick of inspiring confidence.

"I guess not," he repeated. "Always keep to the left."

"Then we'll always be right," I reply.

The lumberman waited for a moment to let it soak in, then grinned, while my elder looked pensive.

"And never be left," I added. The pensive cast on my elder's face deepened into sadness, while we "hit up a clip" just to show our lumberman friend that we might be trusted to take care of ourselves, and that he need not sit up for us that night.

"Shall we land?" I enquire as we paddle past the wharves where the boats tie up.

"I would like to make that mouth before dark," replies my prudent elder, and we deny ourselves the seductive allurements of this fishing metropolis and set our faces toward the mouth.

A strong head wind and choppy waves make us bend our backs and catch all the lee shore we can. The long day's paddle in the sun is beginning to tell upon us, and as the shadows from the big elms on the west bank begin to throw themselves across our way our longing grows for our river's multiplied mouth.

Down through the Indian reserve we swing, along past the Dynevor Hospital, that institution of hope and comfort and healing to many a sick child of the forest, past Indian houses and wigwams, till "Seven o'clock. We had better boil our kettle," suggests my elder.

"Think so?" I reply with apparent reluctance. I had been waiting an hour for that word. "Well, just as you say," and we draw up to the shore.

An Indian is boat-building beside his house. The chips look tempting, and suggest a fire. The Indian will scarcely look at us, so keen is he about his boat, which is nearly finished.

"Good boat, eh?" I remark.

"Yes, start him dis mornin'."

"Wh—y, good for you! May I have some of these chips?"

With a nod and a grunt he continues his work. I help myself to the chips, and soon our kettle is singing, and we are sitting at tea.

We have taken with us a single day's provisions, and the little pile of sandwiches grows less and less, till just one remains.

"That's yours, captain," says my elder.

"Half of it is."

"No, that's yours. I'm one ahead." And I know him well enough to recognize the finality of his tone. That is the way with your silent men. They save themselves breath and needless bother. Their nay is nay.

"Pretty cold evenin'. Goin' far?"

The tone is nasal and the drawl deliberate. We recognize the ubiquitous, interrogative Yankee.

"Goin' fishin'?" he continues.

"Not exactly."

"Come from Winnipeg? Located there myself. Lived on Market Street in '81. Didn't like the city. Too confined. (Confined in Winnipeg in '81!) So I came out here, and been on this lake for ten years."

"Ten years! Fishing?"

"No!" scornfully.

"Farming?"

"Not much; tradin', and fixin' things up for the Indians and settlers. There's my boat," pointing to a small fishing-boat tied up beside our canoe.

"Fixing things?" we inquired.

"Oh, stoves and watches."

"Stoves and watches?"

"Yes. I'm a tinsmith by trade, but anything is in my line."

"Why, can you make a living at stoves and watches out here?"

"Well, fair to middlin'. Do a little tradin' in watches and jewelry and things. I live with the Indians. Stay right in their houses. Get along well with them. Here's a watch, now," pulling out a brilliant gold timepiece. "I sell that for eight dollars."

I exclaim, and loudly admire the watch and wonder at its cheapness.

"Yes, sir, that's a mighty good watch—quadruple

gold plate and gold works. If any man wants a reg'lar good, reliable timepiece——" casting a quick glance at us.

"Didn't I hear you say you wanted a watch, captain?" suggests my elder, regarding me with unsmiling face. "You haven't got one, have you?"

It is true enough. I had given my camping dollar and a half watch to Indian Charlie at Whitefish at the close of my last canoe trip a week ago.

"Well, there's a watch for you," exclaims the peddler. "You can see for yourself it's a good one. Look at them jewels," and he flashes it open in my face. "D'ye see them works?" The stove and watch "fixer" is getting into his stride.

I begin to regret my enthusiastic appreciation of his watch. His manner becomes genial. He comes closer to me and takes the air of one closing a deal, till it seems almost like breaking a promise to decline the bargain.

"Just the thing for a trip like this, too," murmurs my elder sweetly, ignoring my angry glare. "That watch ought to keep good time, now," he continues to the peddler.

"Good time! You bet!" exclaims the peddler with drawling enthusiasm. "The sun ain't in it with that watch."

"Oh, I guess it's a good enough timekeeper," I reply weakly.

"And solid-looking covers, too," suggests my grave-faced elder, with wicked little quivers about the corners of his lips.

"Strong! Built like a church. Why, look at it." And the peddler snaps it in my face.

"Yes, it looks strong enough," I say. "But, I say, old man," turning to my elder, "it's time we were going."

"Don't you really want the watch?" suggests my elder, in what is supposed to be an undertone, though perfectly audible to the peddler.

"No," I reply impatiently. "I don't want the watch at all."

"Guaranteed for five years—written guarantee." The Yankee takes a fresh hold.

"That so? Guaranteed?" My elder becomes intensely interested. "Must be a good watch." I feel like upsetting him into the river.

"Good watch?" echoes the Yankee. "Why, ain't I been tellin' you that for the last half hour? Say," he says, changing his ground, "what do you do in Winnipeg? What line do you follow?"

"Oh, we are in the learned profession," I hasten to reply, feeling that if my elder should reveal my "line," regard for my cloth would render necessary the purchase of that watch.

"O-h! Well, you want a watch anyway, don't you? This here's ——"

"I don't want that watch to-night, thank you. Come on. Let's go."

"Say, if you want that watch," hints my elder, obligingly. "I can lend ——"

This is more than can be borne.

"Now look here, you old humbug, you get into that canoe!"

"Well, good-bye. Good luck," says the peddler, with cheerful resignation. "See you again, likely. I'm often up and down this lake."

"What do you do in the winter?" it occurs to me to ask as the elder gets himself into the canoe.

"Stay right here with the Indians."

I think of the lonely days and nights on this frozen river, and of the life of this strange mortal.

"You cannot make much out of this business, can you? You cannot save much. What are you going to do when you get too old to go up and down the lake? We're all getting old, you know."

"Well, you're right there," says the peddler, soberly, "but," brightening up, "I guess I'll take up a bit of land and raise potatoes. A man can raise a mighty lot of potatoes without much travellin' around."

I looked at the old man, not sure whether I admired most the optimism that can contemplate cheerfully an old age in a patch of potatoes, or pity the narrow vision that is content with a potato patch for its horizon.

"How far to the mouth?" we ask as we part.

"Six miles."

"Good! We can do that before dark. Can we find the channel easily?" We are getting a little anxious about that channel.

"Keep to the west side, but look out for Netley Creek. It comes in from the west. Good-bye."

And we are off again for the lake, six miles away, and for our camp at the beach, ten miles or more further.

"Guess we won't break the record this trip," says my elder, who is ambitious in the matter of records.

"Not with this head wind and this sea."

"We'll get there about twelve, I guess. They're going to have a bonfire for us, so that once we are in the lake we will know our way." That sounds comfortable, for I know that a bonfire on the beach can easily be seen from the mouth.

For an hour or more we put our shoulders onto our paddles, keeping close up to the west bank, and waiting at every turn for the lake to open before us.

"That's Netley Creek, sure," I say, as we pass what looks like a river. "The mouth must be very near now." There is no reply, for the bow will not commit himself.

The darkness is growing deeper. The trees, which have shrunk into willows and alders, are melting into an uncertain blur. The bank is edged with high, thick reeds. Above us the stars are coming out, with the Dipper just ahead of us.

The river gradually widens, giving token, as we think, that the lake is near.

"Hello! there's a boat and a couple of fishermen," says my elder, stopping his paddle.

"Where?" I say.

"There; just over our right quarter."

We paddle within hailing distance.

"Hello! How far is the lake?"

"Eight miles."

"Eight miles? Why, we were told two hours ago that it was only six."

The men consult together, then reply, "It's eight miles good. There's Netley Creek before you."

"Netley Creek! Didn't we pass that an hour ago?"

"No, that's it."

My heart sinks, for I am dead tired. We have been about twelve hours in our canoe, and have had a hard pull against this head wind and choppy sea for the last two hours.

We inquire about the channel, and are again instructed to keep ever to the left, following the main stream and neglecting smaller openings, and we are off again down the darkening river, realizing that there are serious possibilities in our situation.

It is a good time to sing, so I give forth to the shadows about and to the stars overhead "Annie Laurie" and "The Good Old Summer Time," our paddles swinging with the song. My elder has an idea that he cannot sing, and so he is not to be persuaded into melody except in church, where, he says, he merely makes a cheerful noise. But he has a soul for music, and I know by the swing of his paddle that "Good Old Summer Time" has hit the spot. I am not so sure of "Annie Laurie." The sentiment is not so congenial to the hour. We do not yearn to lay us "down and dee." We want to

make the open lake, whence we can see our bonfire. But in the meantime we bail out our canoe at intervals, and keep sending her along down this shadowy, reed-edged stream.

The day is long since gone, the stars alone light our way, and the friendly Dipper gives us our course.

"Hello, is that a house?" says my elder.

"Haystack, I guess."

"Then we'd better remember it."

"What for?"

"Well, we may have to come back and camp there."

"Look here," I reply, "we're not going to give up now. We can't possibly be far from the lake, and from there it will be straight going to our bonfire."

"This is a pretty bad head wind, and they say that the mouth with a head wind is rough enough, and the Sylph isn't exactly a bird."

I have heard of canoes being tied up for days at the mouth of the river by head winds, and I remember with dismay that our provisions are done. It is a good place for "Good Old Summer Time," so I once more sent it forth to the reeds and the stars. The easy sway of my elder's shoulders and the fine careless swing of his paddle assure me that he is in the most cheerful frame of mind, but I omit "Annie Laurie."

On we go, keeping close to these interminable reeds on our left, struggling hard with weariness and sleep.

After a time an opening in the reeds appears. We pause to deliberate. The channel is broad, and there is a steady current. Our directions are, "Keep to the left," so we entrust ourselves to the new channel, and paddle on and on. But before long, what with winding and twisting, and boxing the compass, all sense of direction is swept clean from our minds.

Meantime a storm has been gathering in the east. Clouds come up, and begin to cover our sky; but the friendly Dipper is still there, to our great comfort. At length we become aware of a deep-toned, booming sound, our channel widens into more open water, and the wind strikes fresh upon our faces.

"The mouth at last!" I cry, and we paddle out into open water, with sparse clumps of reeds showing here and there. Away out farther we can hear the roar of the waves. The storm in the east soon blows over, and the stars again appear; but before long the wind shifts and comes in puffs from the west, where clouds begin to gather, lit with lightning flashes. Another storm is gathering.

Rapidly the clouds climb up out of the storm and overspread our sky, wiping out our stars one by one, till at last our old friend the Dipper forsakes us, and we are left in the thick darkness between the growing storm and the deep booming waves of the open lake.

"That storm is from the west," says my elder, cheerfully. "It will at least give us our bearings."

"That's something," I agree, for since our stars

have all gone out the outlook is as black as the night.

The waves are beginning to heave us about in the dark, a driving rain comes pelting on our backs from the storm, but my elder's cheerfulness is invincible.

"That rain will keep down the waves," he remarks, with cheerful indifference.

"Yes, but that wind will drive us clear out into the rollers, and then ——"

We hold on to the next clump of reeds and take counsel. One thing is clear: it is impossible to go forward. We have long ago lost the direction of the channel by which we have come, hence it is equally impossible to go back.

"Better tie up and wait for day," I suggest.

"All right, captain: we'll stretch out and have a rest, anyway."

One would think this elder of mine has made it his nightly custom to stretch himself out in a leaky, tossing old tub of a canoe between a driving storm and a roaring surf.

With stout fishing cord we fasten bow and stern to bunches of these rat-tail reeds, get into our jackets and raincoats, and carefully stretch our legs out over the thwarts.

I suddenly remember a pair of blankets I am bringing down to the beach. We haul them out of my dunnage bag and cover ourselves up, determined to be as comfortable as possible under the circumstances.

And now comes the hardest of the night. While

something is to be done there is neither time nor opportunity for much thought, but now we lie in our canoe listening to the strange sounds that howl at us from out the night—the boom of the breakers out yonder, the swish of the wind as it sweeps past us, the weird cries and chitterings of the myriad waterfowl on every side and the soft hum of the waves here at my elbow.

Heavily our canoe heaves, lifting herself with difficulty, for our dunnage is soaked and heavy. Three good white-caps will fill her up. The storm is gathering force every moment, and the Sylph is tugging at the slim reeds. What if they break and let us into the open! I recall another night, on Lake Nipissing, when in such a storm as this we slipped out along the troughs of the white-caps from the jaws of death, to our own amazement and that of the fisherman to whose hut we made our way.

I see my elder stirring and fumbling about. In a few minutes he manages, under the shelter of his blanket, to light a match.

“Two o'clock,” he says, and we settle down again into silence.

How long the night is to all who wait for the morning! Drearily it drags itself through slow hours.

“What time is it now, old man? Must be after three.”

Again he strikes a match. “Quarter after two.” Again we sink into silence. The strain is becoming almost intolerable, and a vision sweeps over me of a

canoe, empty and waterlogged, tossing somewhere on the surface of Lake Winnipeg, of two homes desolate, of two wives standing white-faced and dumb, listening to a strange fisherman's woeful tale. It is not a pleasant picture, and I shake myself up. This sort of thing won't do. We have need of all our nerve every moment of the next few hours. There is danger about us. It is idle to think anything else, but it is ours to face up to the danger and get the best out of ourselves. That is all we can do.

Is that all? Is there no one abroad in this storm but ourselves? Is there any one that really cares? That reminds me.

"Asleep, old chap?"

"No, not yet." The tone from the bow is quiet and even.

"I say, haven't you been taught to say your prayers before you go to bed?"

"Sure."

"Well, don't you think it is about prayer-time now?"

"Yes, you're right, old man." The answer comes quick, and my elder sits up as straight as he can get himself, and listens as he does in church, while his minister recites that noble song of faith triumphant in the face of peril:

"God is our refuge and our strength,
A very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth do change,
And though the mountains be moved in the heart of the seas,
Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled."

I peer into the tumult of the night about me, and say again: "Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled," and so onward to the great words, "The Lord of Hosts is with us." We had thought—the more shame to us—that we were alone in the midst of the noise. "The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."

A few moments of silence follow the words, and then my elder says quickly, "That is not too bad"; and I know that no fear he has—and he was afterwards man enough to confess to fear—will keep him from playing the game out to the end. "Thank God!" I say in my heart, "I have got a man in the bow. No hysterics about him." And often that and the next day I renewed that thanksgiving.

Then we make our prayer, a single word—we cannot trust ourselves for many—for our dear ones waiting us, and then for ourselves guidance and courage and steadiness to do what can be done.

Immediately I am conscious of a distinct impression that we cannot remain where we are, and that something must be done before the waves get quite beyond us.

"I say, old man, we cannot stay here. This will not shelter us much longer."

"What do you think we ought to do?"

"There's only one thing—make for the storm. That will keep us from drifting out, and, besides, it is the direction of the land."

"All right, if you say so." My elder is becoming

quite cheerful. Every ounce he has is available, and what more can one ask?

We bail out our canoe, get our stuff into shape, cut our cords and face round carefully towards the storm. Now, then, let her go. And with a steady sweep of the paddle we push the Sylph into the teeth of the rain and the wind.

From clump to clump of these rat-tailed reeds we fight our way, noting carefully in the lightning flashes any clump that may seem thicker than the others, to which, if nothing better offers, we may return. The swing of the paddle helps us greatly, and for a time all weariness is forgotten, and we are strong and fit and steady.

After a time my elder breaks the silence.

"Old man," he says deliberately, "I do think these clumps are getting thicker." And hope springs up strong in our hearts, and before long all doubt is past. The clumps are nearer together and decidedly thicker.

"We'll make it, I guess, after all," says my elder.

"After all!" He knows not how his words reveal him, but whatever thoughts had lain in his heart his head was clear and his hand was steady.

Thicker and thicker grow the rushes, until at length, pushing through an open strip of water, the nose of the Sylph—blessed old mumpsy bovine!—sticks itself into a bunch of weeds that hold her fast. A few shoves and thrusts and we pass into the heart of a clump so thick that it closes around us on every side, effectually shutting out all but the sound of the

storm, and making us secure from any wave that can break.

We are wet with sweat and rain, our breath comes in deep, quick gasps, but we lay our paddles across our knees and try to take in that we are safe. In a few moments we have our coats on again, our blankets spread, and after a word of thankfulness to Him who, as we feel sure, has walked this lake to-night as old Galilee so long ago, we compose ourselves to sleep.

As I am dropping off I hear my elder striking a match.

"What time?"

"Three o'clock and a stormy night."

"Let her howl," I say, looking with thankful complaisance upon our reedy shelter waving thick about us and high above our heads.

The scream of a duck awakes me. I lazily open my eyes and look up. The storm is past. The stars are fading in the blue sky overhead. A tender, pearly gray shows at the line where our sheltering weeds touch the horizon. The air is full of the love cries and war-cries of wild duck and loons and mud-hens. The bent reed tops are swaying gently over us in the fresh breeze, and the age-long, ancient miracle is being wrought before our eyes. The rosy-fingered daughter of morn is opening the gates of day. The night, indeed, is gone. It is the dawn.

For some minutes I lie under the spell of that sweet mystery, drinking deep draughts of the new life that heaven pours out upon the waking world,

morning by morning, through the golden gates of day. Then I remember that the wind rises with the sun, that we must make across the lake before breakfast. I stretch myself mightily and groan aloud. My elder lifts his hat from off his face. I almost start—his face is drawn and gaunt and gray.

The night's doings have left their mark upon him.

"Hello!" I cry. "Had a sleep?"

"No, but I enjoyed yours." His smile is like the morning, and drives away the shadows from his face.

"Too bad! Now I feel quite fresh—— O-u-c-h! Who's been pounding me all night? I've got at least sixteen hundred joints and muscles, and every one of them aches."

But we cannot afford to lose a minute, and I stand up and look about me, searching for the lake. Near us are thick patches of reedy grass; away to the north and west, in which direction our path lies, there appears some open water with bunches of the thin, rat-tailed reeds that had been our disappointment last night, and far over the reeds a faint blue line that may be shore or woods. The lake must lie somewhere to the north, we decide, and the way must be through those open spaces of water.

It is still dim light, we are stiff and sore, but we must reach the lake before the wind makes it impassable for our canoe, so once more we take the watery trail.

Space after space of open water we cross, making ever towards the north and west, till the open spaces are reduced to channels winding among great patches

of weeds and rushes. Often, standing upright in our canoe, we seek for a sign of the open lake, but none appears. Hour after hour we strive to make our way, now through this channel and now through that, but all in vain. Again and again we strike a hopeful passage and follow its sinuous windings, only to find it end in a solid mass of reeds, whose plumed heads wave ten feet above us. The long paddle of yesterday and the long strain of the stormy night are beginning to tell upon us.

"That lake must be more towards the east," my elder suggests, and, heading eastward, we renew our search, but still in vain. Open spaces invite us, channels lure us, only to bring bitter disappointment.

And now the sun is high above us, the wind has risen, is dead ahead. We are forced to fight for every yard we make, and an exhausting fight it is. I can only mechanically swing my paddle, with little or no force in the stroke, and even my elder, iron and steel though he be, must call a halt now and then to stretch his legs and gather strength. Still the spaces and the channels lure and disappoint us.

"Look here, old man," at length I cry impatiently. "What does this mean?"

"It means, I fear, that we are in big Netley Marsh," replied my elder, quietly, "and the question is how to get out."

We hold counsel. Evidently there is no passage to the north and west. The lake lies certainly eastward, and the mouth is southeast. The only thing left us is to retrace our way to the more open water

which an hour or two ago we crossed, and then make towards the east, where lies the open lake ; but that means a paddle of at least ten, it may be twenty miles or more, and at the end of it there is the possibility of an impassable lake. But it is the only course left us.

We had our morning prayer before we left our bed among the reeds, but as we turn back to this long and doubtful way my heart rises again in appeal to Him who has proved Himself our refuge in the storm.

No sooner had we turned our canoe about than my elder, pointing with outstretched arm, cries out, "Look there!" and looking, I can hardly believe my eyes. There, right over our canoe, between masses of tall, feathery reeds, a narrow channel stretches for miles, it seems, westward to a little house.

"Let us make for the house," suggests my elder.

We know well how doubtful is the attempt, for, though the house stands in plain view, the way to it may be blocked by impenetrable masses of reeds. I hesitate, for, if we fail in this attempt, I fear we shall have little strength for the other. If we only had something to eat. "What fools we were," I grumble.

"Let us try it," says my elder. "I believe it is the best."

This time it is mine to follow. "All right, if you say so," and we face down the channel.

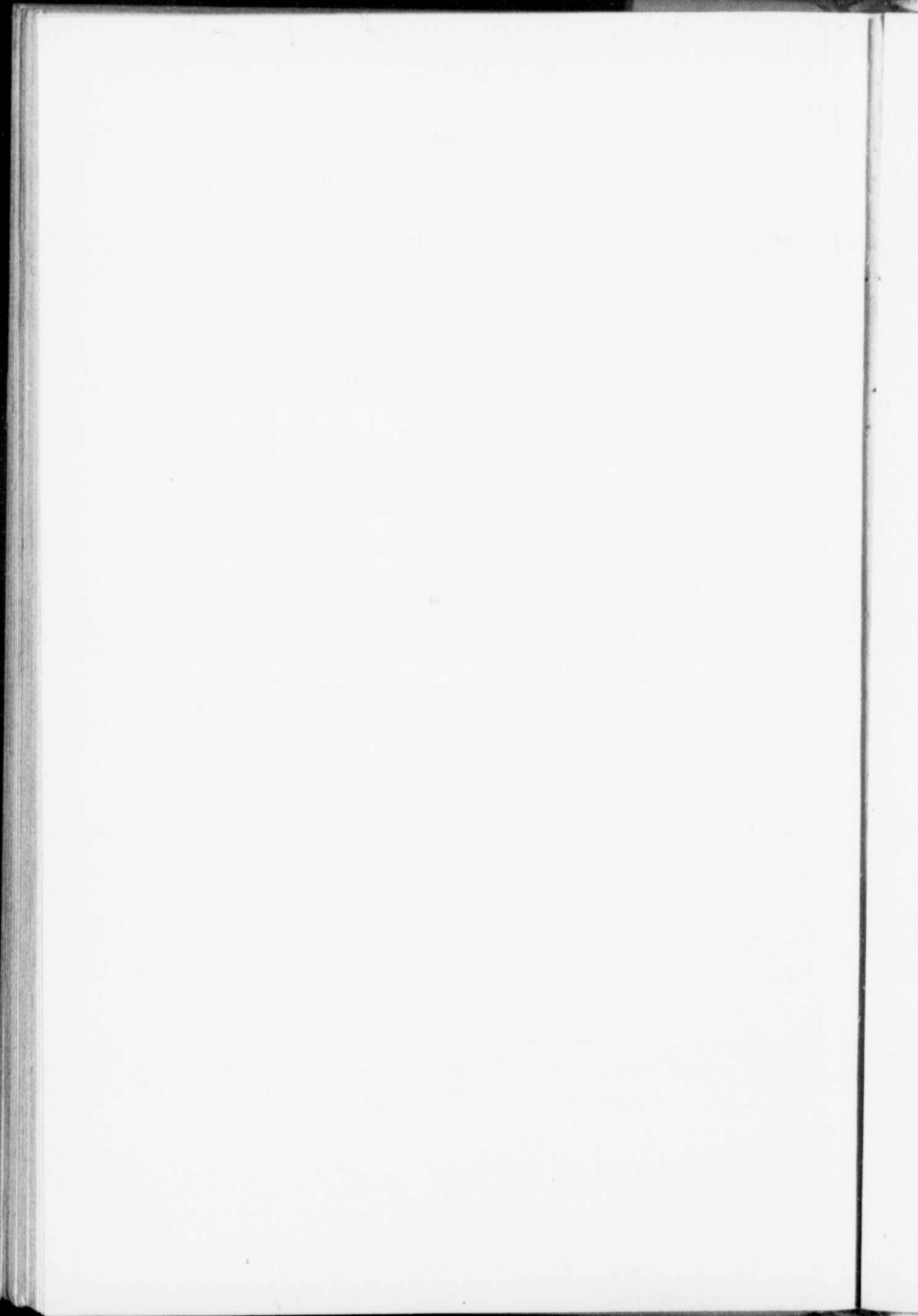
An hour's paddle, pushing, wading, dragging and we reach mud, then solid ground, and silently shake hands.

The little house is the home of an old lady who had been born in the Mackenzie River country, and, familiar with all the perils of journeyings in this wild land, greets us first with amazement at our escape, then with wrath at our folly, and, last of all, with kindly welcome. She feeds us with the best she has, after which we fall asleep on the grass for an hour, and wake ready once more for battle.

Meantime the old lady's son-in-law has arrived, and undertakes to pilot us in his punt through the marshes to the sand bar, beyond which lies our lake. For an hour or more we follow him, marvelling at his instinct for an open passage, till sure enough he brings us to the bar. We lift the Sylph across and point her for home, which we make as the sun is disappearing behind the tall trees in the west.

We stagger stiffly out of our canoe, hardly believing that we have arrived. We have broken the record, sure enough, and for the next three days it is quite safe for any enemy to vaunt himself over us. Even my iron and steel bound elder, as I afterwards learned, bears with meekness the jeers of one of the youngsters who had done it in sixteen hours.

But as often as I turn upon my bed to ease the hot spot under my steering shoulder a threefold resolve shapes itself in my brain: First, that I shall announce no record till it is made, and, second, that when next I seek the Red River's multitudinous mouth I shall carry with me three days' grub, and, lastly, and chiefly, I shall take my elder with me.



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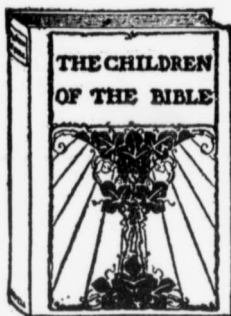
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